

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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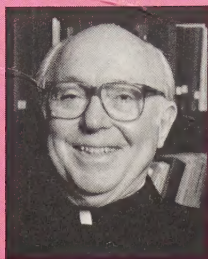
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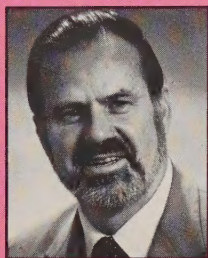




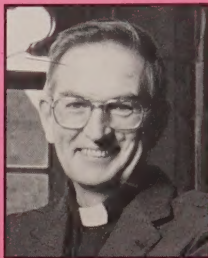
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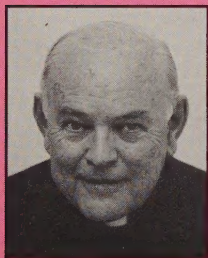
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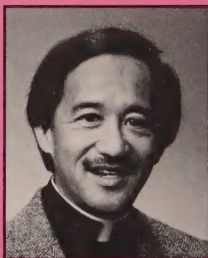
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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## MORE COACHES AND CHEERLEADERS NEEDED

**T**he curtain had hardly been raised on the current United Nations-designated International Year of the Family when Pope John Paul II, celebrating the church's 38th World Day of Communications, chose to fire a salvo of strongly reproachful judgments at the worldwide television industry. Despite the fact that just last summer television had displayed to the ends of the earth his own historic meeting with President Clinton at Regis University and his series of inspirational addresses to the multitude of young people who pilgrimaged to Denver, Colorado, for his World Youth Day, the pope vigorously accused the medium of generally failing to exert its potential to help families achieve their God-given goals. Television, he complained, spreads "degrading values and models of behavior by broadcasting pornography and graphic depictions of brutal violence." As a result, the pope contends, the moral development of children throughout the world is being severely impaired. The pope also blamed television for having the negative effect of isolating family members "in their own private worlds," and he censured parents for using the tube as "an electronic baby-sitter."

As reported in the *New York Times*, the Holy Father urged parents "to demand that television develop a strict, legally enforceable code of ethics to safeguard children." He encouraged the heads of families to express their legitimate concerns to media executives, and then reminded television producers that they have "serious moral responsibilities to the families that make up a large part of their audience."

On the same wintry day that I was giving a good deal of thought to the pope's deep concerns about the media and the Vatican's 1992 observation that "today, much that men and women know and think about life is conditioned by the media," I happened to notice an article in the February 1994 issue of *Esquire* magazine that kept me thinking about parents' and television's responsibility for influencing children's beliefs and behavior. It reported a survey of the views and convictions of a thousand young American women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Some of *Esquire's* findings disturbed me. For example, (1) if they had a million dollars to spare, twice as many of the respondents would "buy a summer house in the South of France" than would "contribute to a shelter for battered women"; (2) far more of them would rather "boost the size of their income" than would want to "increase the strength of their political power"; (3) by a ratio of 80 to 18, they would prefer to "spend all weekend getting the full treatment at Canyon Ranch Spa than participate in a march for gender equality in the workplace"; and (4) the majority would rather "receive a gift of sexy underwear than a good book."

Syndicated newspaper columnist Ellen Goodman, commenting on the *Esquire* study, wrote: "Let us not forget that other responses show that half of these woman would 'rather be dead than fat' and also that they would 'want men to think they're better at their careers than at child raising.'" Similarly, Anna Quindlen, writing in the *New York Times* about the same survey, described the findings as "presenting a feminism of the young, featuring an agenda heavy on sex when and how they want it, with no guilt, no regrets."

More profoundly and alarmingly, E. Jean Carroll's commentary in *Esquire* included the following



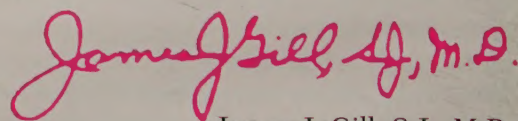
observation: "What struck me is that these young women are not reported to have problems maintaining self-control, to bring their behavior in line with commonly accepted moral principles. On the contrary, they *lack* the moral principles; they start with an assumption that whatever they want to do is all right, and that traditional values and attitudes towards sexual behavior can be ignored with absolute impunity." And, I would add, the majority gave no evidence at all of being influenced by Judeo-Christian teachings regarding human sexuality.

But what has to be done in order to prevent the continuation of this obvious trend toward secular, self-indulgent hedonism? The pope has told parents that they can help to curb television's pernicious influence by learning to "turn the set off" rather than let their children absorb the erotic and violent toxins the visual medium conveys. To complement the Holy Father's advice, a motto used by the Omega Boys Club of San Francisco reminds us that parents alone cannot be held responsible for the attitudes and values their children adopt and display. That motto, "It takes an entire village to raise a child," deserves a lot of contemplation. It implies that the survey answers in *Esquire* tell us a great deal about ourselves and what we are not yet doing in behalf of the young.

Isn't it time for parents to meet with teachers, clergy, coaches, media executives, and others who are in a position to influence the character development of the young, and decide together upon concrete ways in which each will strive to contribute to the formation of young people's attitudes and beliefs about relationships, sexuality, pleasures, and life? Their behavior will always reflect their convictions, and we can help them develop Christian convictions, but only if we are listening and watching for evidence of what is taking shape in their minds. This entails being close to them and attentive to their values, challenging any harmful attitudes and beliefs they are adopting, and above all providing an

example of how a maturely Christian way of life is lived. Among the most misleading pieces of guidance I have ever heard given to adults—especially to parents—is educator John Thelwall's too widely accepted contention that it is "unfair to influence a child's mind by inculcating any opinions before it should have come to years of discretion and be able to choose for itself." The fruits of such a philosophy are now revealed in *Esquire*.

William J. Bennett, former United States secretary of education, wrote wisely in *The Book of Virtues: A Treasury of Great Moral Stories*: "How do we encourage our children to persevere, to persist in their efforts to improve themselves and the lot of others? By standing by them, and with them and behind them; by being coaches and cheerleaders, and by the witness of our own example." In other words, we can assist them to grow toward moral maturity by providing something that television—even if it comes up with a code that is perfect—will never be able to supply. Parents and all of us who are truly concerned about the well-being of the young can cooperatively show them a constantly caring kind of love that gives unmistakable evidence of our desire that they have the best possible experience of life. At the same time, we can invite them to accompany us along the uphill path we ourselves are striving to climb in order to understand and live out faithfully the moral teachings of Mount Sinai and of Jesus Christ. This concerted, intergenerational approach is what I believe is implied when we rightly identify the raising of the young as a task for the entire village. The article in *Esquire* has done us a jolting service by displaying how urgently our collaborative response is needed—right now.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief



# Leadership for the Church's Future

*Donna J. Markham, O.P., Ph.D.*

**I**would like to begin these reflections with two stories: one about Nini Rainier—let's call her a community organizer—and the other about Max DePree, the incredibly successful president of a furniture company. It seems to me that both these people exemplify qualities essential for leading into the future.

Do you remember, when you were a little girl or boy, knowing a wonderful older kid you just idolized and wanted to be like? Well, when Nini Rainier was 10 and I was 7, I was utterly convinced that Nini was the most fantastic little girl I had ever met. She was older than most of the kids on the block, but she would play with us, so we all thought she was terrific. She would regularly round all of us up to do marvelous things. She'd get Lizzy Lewis and Scrap and Mudball Benton and Ritty Salzberg and Katie McKee and me organized into great games of kick-the-can or timed contests to see who could collect the most locusts. She was particularly good at enticing Mudball to pick up the locusts that we'd find in the bushes. Mudball would pick them up by their wings and carefully put them in our milk bottles, which we would then lovingly carry home as presents for our mothers. One day, in a particularly daring act of cementing our circle of friends, Nini showed us how to make a magic potion out of milk,

ground worms, and dandelion leaves. Dabbing a bit of this concoction on each of our wrists, we knew that we would all be sealed as friends forever.

Sometimes Nini would lead us in "church." It didn't matter to any of us that Lizzy and Ritty were Jewish and that Scrap and Mudball were Protestants. Nini would teach us some pig latin, and we'd devoutly receive Necco wafers on our tongues. The greatest thing was that Nini always treated us as if we were 10 years old too.

Nini had a beautiful turquoise dress with big, white, fluffy clouds painted all along the bottom and pink watercolor flowers on the top. I thought it was positively the most beautiful dress in the whole world—it reminded me of Alice in Wonderland. One day, when we were all gathered at Nini's house to play, Nini came downstairs with her beautiful dress in her arms. It was all ironed and neatly folded. "Here, this is for you," she said to me. "I'm getting too tall for it. Besides, I love you!" I wore and wore and wore that dress until one day I, too, got too tall.

## STRATEGIC VISION

Leadership is about building relationships and unifying a circle of friends. Leadership is about



believing in the value and worth of each person. And perhaps most important, leadership is about serving and about giving away what you have out of love. Nini was a wonderful leader.

But leadership is also about vision, and 10-year-olds aren't too long on vision yet.

Max DePree, president of the phenomenally successful Herman Miller Company—a company that designs “ethospace”—said, “From time to time I am asked, ‘What is your personal goal for your company?’ When one loves jazz, one thinks of Louis Armstrong. When one truly enjoys baseball, one thinks of Sandy Koufax. When we respond to the French impressionists, we think of Renoir. Each of these beautifully trained, beautifully disciplined persons is special to us because he is a gift to the spirit. My goal for the Herman Miller Company is that when people both inside the company and outside the company look at all of us, not as a corporation, but as a group of people working intimately within a covenantal relationship, they'll say, ‘Those folks are a gift to the spirit.’”

Clearly, Max DePree had a vision for his company, and he knew how to make it become a reality. As religious leaders moving with the community of believers into the next century, we must love the group and its mission, and we must have a strategic vision and the skills to make it become a reality. If those qualities are not present, we have no business being in leadership. What if people looking at our dioceses, congregations, and institutions witnessed a group of people working in covenantal relationships—alive, happy, loving people uncompromisingly committed to the common good? Perhaps they would say of us, “Those folks are truly a gift of the Spirit.”

## PROMOTION OF UNITY

Effective leadership is about liberation, about loving, about listening, about telling the truth and taking risks, about solidifying the circle of friends for the sake of the mission. Excellent leaders are mentors who are committed to excellent communication, to serving, and to making sure that conflicts are resolved well. Knowing that groups respond to their leaders' dynamics, they are aware of their responsibility to be focused, healthy, and courageous. To say this another way: Groups respond to the pathology of their leaders, so it behooves us not to be overly pathological.

Fundamentally, good leadership is about vision and unity for the sake of the good we hold in common. In other words, religious leaders, at their best, foster covenantal relationships among members

who are inspired and excited by the realization of a shared vision of liberation and communion among all God's creation. They focus on the future, on the realization of the mission—not on maintaining how things are. Maintenance leaders burn out quickly.

## NEW PARADIGMS ARISING

What does that mean for us leaders at this precise moment in history? Futurists tell us that it takes thirty to forty years for new ideas to be converted into practice. If this is indeed true, we might do well to look back at what was hinted at thirty years ago to see how we are now poised on the precipice of putting into practice major structural changes that were conceived in the sixties and seventies. I think it is fair to say that we are now experiencing shifts in the practice of our daily business as new paradigms are increasingly straining to break forth.

In the sixties and seventies, charismatic leaders (including Pope John XXIII, Martin Luther King, Jr., Marshall McLuhan, Shirley Chisholm, and many individuals from our own dioceses and congregations) drew attention to radically new ways of conceptualizing social, ecclesial, and political systems. Roman Catholicism, religious life, Eurocentric culture, communications media, and education are but a few of the large social institutions that were profoundly reenvisioned during those two decades. Other movements had their impact on us, as well—the women's movement, the sexual revolution, the peace movement paralleling the war in Vietnam, energy conservation, and the incipient green movement.

The sixties and seventies were wildly creative years characterized by restlessness and excitement, and sometimes by iconoclastic provocation. The intuitive sensitivity of great leaders created an atmosphere that freed many people to question the status quo and to be unafraid to admit that many established systems simply weren't working. These visionary leaders set out to evoke change. We trusted them, and we followed. The multidirectional issuance of the call to transform began this end-of-the-millennium process of conversion. We might think of it as the first stage of the trek toward establishing a new, universal covenant. While extraordinary leaders issued challenges and calls for social transformation, it was left for future leaders—for us—to critique, envision, and devise strategies to alter old assumptions and fundamental behaviors of human beings. It has been left to us to be covenantal leaders—solidifying the community, freeing the energy of the group for the sake of the mission.



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## As religious leaders, we must be willing to keep hope and vision before people while modeling commitment ourselves by living in reality, not fantasy

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### ESTABLISHING NEW COVENANT DIFFICULT

Our experience has told us that this is terribly difficult work. Like the Israelites, whose first fervor of responding to the call and following Moses into the desert was quashed by years of discouragement and strong temptations to turn back, we have tasted the bitter pain of discouragement and the confusion of not knowing where we are headed. We have struggled with the group's resistance to change, which has at times perhaps seemed insurmountable. In many ways, the eighties and nineties have been times of ambivalent floundering; of moving forward, then retreating; of being intrigued and captivated by rampant individualism and consumerism; of being tempted to settle into, and settle for, life in an overly gadgetized, polluted wasteland in which we are far too comfortable to be roused for the rest of the journey. But these are also exciting times that hold the promise of making our world a little better place. This is precisely the world into which we religious leaders are called to inject meaning and reinspire vision. To contend with our own discouragement and to be reinvigorated, we must be willing to entrust ourselves to the support of others who are leading with us, lest we give up and settle for complacent maintenance leadership. We know that in the absence of excellent covenantal religious leadership, the community will continue to wander aimlessly or, worse yet, turn back altogether. There is far too much at stake to let that happen to us. Weak leaders collude in fostering delusions of security and comfort, thereby distracting us from the harsh demands of the relinquishment that must precede the realization of the promised vision.

In the United States, we had a wonderful example of a successfully deluding, weak leader in the person of Ronald Reagan. When he took office in 1980, the nation had an \$800 million deficit. By the time he left office eight years later, the deficit had grown to \$2.3 trillion. The frightening thing was that the majority of Americans were cajoled into believing that the deficit was only temporary and that our life-style of unchecked spending and credit could continue without undue concern. Even more disturbing is the fact that "the great communicator" remains one of the most popular presidents in recent history.

### FUTURE BUILT ON TRUTH

But covenantal leaders must tell the truth. The future cannot be built on deception. As religious leaders, we must be willing to keep hope and vision before people while modeling commitment ourselves by living in reality, not fantasy. We must be willing to tell the truth, even when the message is a difficult one for the community to hear. Excellent leaders place priority on the mission—even to the point of subordinating their personal needs for affiliation and popularity.

As we examine our experience of church and religious life in the past decade and a half, we see temptations on the part of some to return to the nostalgia of the past, or to entertain the fantasy that the calls of the sixties and seventies for profound structural conversion and gender equality were nothing more than passing fads that were not relevant to the church and therefore could be ignored or suppressed. Fears of the consequences of the vision have caused some to hold tenaciously to the past. We know how painful this is to contend with and how deeply disheartening it is to try to engage with persons who respond from this perspective. In some cases we see even reactionary attempts to wield power and exercise control that might have worked reasonably well once but are woefully inadequate, if not destructive, in meeting the needs of today.

### PIONEERS NEEDED

Outstanding religious leaders for the mid-nineties and beyond will be men and women who can truly be architects of a new universal covenant. A "settler" mentality—circling the wagons around the campfire and staying put—will not move us out of our comfort with the status quo. We desperately need "paradigm pioneers," as Joel Barker calls them—strategic leaders who, leading from the values of the heart, will forge the way toward the promise of a world bound in ever-deepening communion. The



key is the bonding of members in networks of compassion and action for the sake of the mission of the gospel.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF BEST LEADERS

In their research on religious leadership (reported in *Review for Religious*, May-June 1993), David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis have found that the outstanding religious leader possesses the basic competencies of information gathering, administrative adeptness, and efficiency; the cognitive abilities of conceptualization and analytical thinking; and mission awareness. In addition to these foundational leadership competencies, excellent religious leaders—I prefer to call them covenantal leaders—also possess a profound awareness of God's presence, which enables them to discern and speak to the meaning of what is happening in a changing world. They have a great desire to make things better and to make things happen. They articulate a shared collective and enabling vision that is so compelling that members desire to commit to it. These covenantal leaders consistently focus on strategy over maintenance, on where the group desires to go and on how it will get there, rather than on sustaining the everyday functioning of the way things are. They are able to be objective and truthful about what is going on in their congregations and have a demonstrated capacity for empathy, which enables understanding and commitment on the part of members for collective action. These leaders' energy is far more directed toward arousing commitment to the vision and meeting the goals to obtain it than toward becoming involved in interpersonal concerns such as supervising or counseling individual members. They mobilize commitment by consensus building rather than by decree and directives.

The Nygren-Ukeritis research findings are consistent with what our experience tells us, and with what many consultants purport to be necessities for designing and implementing the pervasive structural changes that are called for as we enter the next century.

## COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS ESSENTIAL

The covenantal leader's success is predicated on spiritual depth and psychological equilibrium. Such qualities enable the leader to build networks of relationships ("teamnets," to use the term coined by Jessica Lipnack and Jeffry Stamps) that combine and capitalize on the leadership talents of each member in the congregation or institution. I believe

that an inability or unwillingness to form teamnets, to collaborate and to cooperate as faith-filled women and men, would undermine and ultimately destroy us as a church.

Covenantal relationships are founded on the shared commitment to the mission, values, goals, and management processes that the outstanding religious leader inspires. Such organizational relationships reflect unity and grace and, in their sacred reflection of these values, inspire the church to be an agent of change for the good of the global community. This represents an enormous challenge for us as leaders in our church. In addition to possessing all the skills cited in research on contemporary organizational development, the covenantal leader must serve as a catalyst for theological reflection and honest sharing of our collective faith experience. Without such deliberate attention to spirituality and to the nudging direction of a God who is faithful to the promise, we risk losing touch with the meaning of transformative change and conversion. When that happens, members become disheartened, and attrition sets in. When groups suffer from attrition and the inability to attract new membership, the meaning question is at the heart of the matter. Sadly, overt attention to spirituality often gets lost in the midst of crisis management in the day-to-day exercising of leadership.

## PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT

Covenantal leadership forms the basis of effective participative management. The formation of networks of value-driven, faith-filled teams, communally committed to the goals needed to realize the promise of the future, is key to the success of any institution that is to flourish in the decades to come. This calls us to examine critically our current modes of operating and to move assertively toward empowering strategic teams that spend as much time in reflective sharing around the meaning of the mission as they do in the hard work in achieving it.

Participative management is not the same as democracy. Having influence and being listened to, being valued and supported, and sharing deeply held beliefs is not the same as having a vote. Majority rule or absolute consensual agreement are not necessarily decision-making styles that will break open the future. Too often they result in cautious, untimely, and unimaginative action that arises from what is familiar.

Covenantal leadership ensures that decisions will not be arbitrary, secret, or closed to questioning, and that each decision moves the congregation closer to its preferred future.



## SOME LEADERS DANGEROUS

The Nygren-Ukeritis study differentiated between typical and outstanding leaders. I have thus far focused on the covenantal leader as an expression of outstanding leadership needed at this moment in history. I will now address what I see as dangerous, or poor, leadership. There are at least three types of persons who may assume leadership today who are quite dangerous to the life of a group. These leaders do not simply keep a group trapped in the present; they actually inflict harm. They become leaders because they hold out apparent certainty and comfortable, larger-than-life solutions to people who are tired of the ambiguity of these times. They are dangerous because they fracture covenantal relationships through their lack of psychological equilibrium. The group becomes “sick” as it attempts to respond to the disturbed dynamics of the leader. The three I will focus on are the Narcissist, the Empty Suit, and the Talking Head. While each of these leaders inflicts harm on the group, my experience as a consultant leads me to believe that the Narcissist is the most treacherous.

### THE NARCISSIST

Narcissists are found in leadership positions because their projection of power and drama and their uncanny knack for establishing quick, superficial relationships magnetize others into following them. Unfortunately, the initial excitement that the Narcissist generates is only short-lived. People quickly discover that something is lacking; something is terribly wrong. The leader's promises cannot be fulfilled, because personal fame and notoriety are more important to him or her than team-building and committing to the hard task of the long-range vision. The Narcissist's chief concern is the preservation of self-importance and attention. Grandiosity and paranoia give rise to uninhibited, impulsive decision making, disregard of organizational processes, and the inability to tolerate any real exchange of ideas. The Narcissist believes that he or she possesses the truth and that others exist only to mirror the Narcissist's self in carrying out his or her fantasies. Underlying such an attitude of arrogance and self-righteousness is a profound sense of personal impotence. Consequently, any situation that challenges the Narcissist intensifies his or her feelings of powerlessness, and the Narcissist responds with vengeance, rage, and a backlash of autocratic control and punishment. Organizations led by Narcissists are in serious peril. The problem is that groups seldom recognize the source of the difficulty before the situation has

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**Certain leaders are dangerous because they fracture covenantal relationships through their lack of psychological equilibrium**

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reached critical proportions. People have been so manipulated and intimidated that they often lack the stamina to confront the leader. In such cases, the hope is that the Narcissist will experience some psychic pain, stemming from conflicts in his or her personal life, that will necessitate intervention, or that members can coalesce sufficiently to call for an outside consultant to be brought in to analyze and assist with the faltering situation. The Narcissist lacks the capacity for self-examination and is too rigidly defended to hear feedback. When confronted, this leader frequently terminates his or her position—actually the best of all outcomes, since Narcissists do not fundamentally change.

### THE EMPTY SUIT

Suffering from a condition sometimes referred to as the “Oz Factor,” the Empty Suit is intrinsically unable to lead from a sense of inner authority, so he or she must copy. The Empty Suit is a hollow person whose sense of leadership is derived from a superficial enactment of a role. While he or she has an incredible talent for mimicry, this person is quite shallow. Symbolically, this impostor often takes on the role of the all-nurturing parent, destined to satisfy all the group members' unmet needs for gratification. To followers, the Empty Suit is someone who really seems to understand their every need and promises to take care of them. Empty Suits have learned how to act and behave, but the inner substance is missing. Helping professions and social institutions such as the church and religious congregations have their share of these pseudo-leaders. Because they function through a role rather



than from a sense of identity and inner authority, they are unable to foster leadership in others. They are deeply threatened by shared leadership for fear that their hollowness and fraudulence will be discovered. Their feelings of being phony and inadequate make it difficult for them to take goal-directed action. They waffle and procrastinate in decision making. Consequently, the organizations they lead tend to become paralyzed. The advantage that Empty Suits have over Narcissists is that their level of subjective discomfort frequently leads them to seek professional consultation.

## THE TALKING HEAD

A third type of poor leader is the alexithymic Talking Head—the person who functions from a fundamental base of denying feelings and emotions. This depersonalized automaton relates to others with cool indifference. He or she is impervious to the feelings of others, lacks interpersonal connection, and has little insight into how his or her overly rationalized behavior affects others. Because Talking Heads negate or deny emotions, they are unable to function in team situations. Uncomfortable with others, they tend to be distant and aloof. Their inability to connect with others emotionally makes it impossible for them to foster the covenantal relationships needed for the institutions of the future. Usually, these leaders experience some overwhelming organizational conflict they are unable to understand, and this motivates them to seek consultation.

## A GIFT OF THE SPIRIT

The Narcissist, the Empty Suit, and the alexithymic Talking Head do damage to organizations of all kinds, including dioceses and religious communities. Unlike the typical leader identified by Nygren and Ukeritis, these leaders only appear to possess basic leadership competencies. Furthermore, they lack spiritual depth and psychological balance. Not only are they unable to enter into covenantal relationship; they also serve to destroy whatever communal networking may be developing through in-

formal leadership channels. It is to our advantage, and to the advantage of those groups we serve, to recognize any of these destructive characteristics in ourselves and be nondefensive in receiving feedback.

The church's leaders for the future must be excellent leaders, committed to building covenantal relationships through which the vision will be realized. They are mentors who are no strangers to suffering, who from the depths of their own belief express compassion and deep love for the group. They are people who work deliberately and directly at establishing networks of teams that liberate the collective spirit of the group and place that power at the service of the community. Rooted in faith and committed to processes of formal and informal theological reflection, these are trusting and trustworthy people who inspire commitment to the vision of a more liberated and unified world. They are not afraid to take action and to develop strategies that will lead to profound change and institutional conversion. They are the risk takers who lead to places where some of us may be afraid to go on our own.

Let us hope, and let us pray for one another, that we will be the leaders who will make others say of our church, "They are truly a gift of the Spirit."

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# Gossip and Scapegoating Cripple Pastoral Innovation

Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.

*Among all parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world: it infects the whole body; catching fire itself from hell, it sets fire to the whole wheel of creation. (James 5:6)*

**T**hough gossip, simply defined, is idle talk about people who are not present, it is one of the most powerful yet complex forms of human communication. A characteristic of all cultures, gossip is designed to ruin an individual's or a group's reputation; it is an avenue for the betrayal of secrets and a serious obstacle to change. It gratifies the envy gossipers feel toward others by denigrating the latter's achievements; it provides gossipers with a sense of power over people and a temporary feeling of bonding with their listeners. Individuals, by chattering about other people in a derogatory way, are able to avoid having to face serious issues within themselves and in the group itself. Gossip says "Other people have problems, not us." "Gossip," writes Josiah Holland, "is always a personal confession either of malice or imbecility." An overdramatic comment, but the author nonetheless correctly draws our attention to the fact that gossip can be a thoroughly nasty business.

This article seeks to clarify the meaning of gossip from a cultural anthropological perspective, stressing particularly its deleterious power to obstruct communication and pastoral innovation.

## GOSSIP IS AGGRESSION

Gossip is the intimate interchange of prejudicial information within social groups, with or without deliberate malicious intent, about people and the way they act. Gossip without a consciously evil intent is synonymous with what is commonly referred to as just "tittle-tattle." Without any prearranged planning, people tell stories or comment about the lives of people outside the group, but the effects on people's lives can be as disastrous as those of gossip intended to be injurious. As James C. Scott notes in *Domination and the Art of Resistance*, gossip is a most familiar and elementary form of disguised popular aggression. It is a disguised form of aggression inasmuch as it is commonly prefaced with a comment like "You know, I do not wish him/her any harm, but . . ." (after which gossipers proceed to do precisely what they say they will not do).

In all gossip at least three people (or groups) are involved: the gossip, the person(s) gossiped to, and the person or group gossiped about. The gossip, motivated by envy or rage over other people's successes, achieves at the moment of gossiping a sense of power over the person gossiped about. The person receiving the information not only shares this power but also feels flattered that he or she is trusted to hear the news. Friendship or alliance between the two parties is therefore reinforced. In brief, a yearning for power, or the desire to control



others for one's own benefit, is at the heart of gossip. In the act of gossiping, the gossip and the receiver of the information at least temporarily feel that they have the satisfaction of depowering the person or group gossiped about. Moreover, gossip is a particularly safe form of power manipulation or aggression for its perpetrators, for two reasons: the gossip claims to be merely passing on information and so refuses to take responsibility for it, and it is all done in an atmosphere of trustful secrecy. The damage is done without anyone being called to testify to the information's objective accuracy.

## GOSSIP IN ACTION

Examples of gossip abound in the scriptures. The serpent in the garden gossips with Eve about God with evil intent: "No! You will not die! God knows in fact that the day you eat, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). The brothers of Joseph gossip about him, even planning to kill him (Gen. 37:18-20). Herod, for his own cruel ends, seeks to engage the wise men in gossip, but they break its spell by being warned in a dream not to cooperate further (Matt. 2:7-12). In the account of the temptation of Jesus in the desert, the devil calculatingly seeks to involve Jesus in gossip about God. Jesus will have none of it: "Away with you, Satan! The Lord your God is the one to whom you must do homage; him alone you must serve" (Matt. 4:10). Jesus later condemns his critics for gossiping maliciously behind his back. He publicly names the prejudices in their gossip: "For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He is possessed.' The Son of Man came, eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'" (Matt. 11:18 ff.). On another occasion Jesus identifies the whispering campaign against him and upbraids those responsible for it: "Stop complaining to each other" (John 6:43). They had scorned his teaching: "Surely this is Jesus, son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know" (John 6:42).

While researching a small culture of an oppressed island people living on the fringe of a dominant Western society, I discovered the enormous power of gossip as a source of identity and also of social control. The islanders' sense of personal and cultural self-worth had been destroyed because of the paternalistic actions of a foreign colonial power over a period of a century. Representatives of this government residing on the island, and the islanders themselves, constantly reinforced their separate identities and opposition to each other through gossip. Islanders,

in the safe privacy of their homes or social gatherings, would recount true or false human failings of government officials. While recounting these lapses, the gossipers would often laugh uproariously over the perceived stupidities of the officials and the government they represented. Gossip provided its agents with a renewed sense of self-worth and equality because the outsiders, despite their symbols of power, were nonetheless presented as stupid people, "not like us islanders." Islanders, however, were not aware that government officials and their families gossiped about them; the more outlandish the stories, the more convinced the outsiders were of their own sense of superiority and cohesion.

As Robert Paine has observed, gossip is sometimes defined as a cultural device used by the individual(s) to forward their own interests. The previous example emphasizes the relevance of this definition: the oppressed group is helped to make life bearable through its gossiping about the paternalistic colonial officials. Likewise, the more the government officers and their families gossiped about the islanders, the more confident they felt about their own sense of superiority. At the heart of gossip, therefore, there is an underlying streak of narcissism or self-interest ("My well-being must be enhanced, even if it means passing on lies or breaking secrets in order to ruin the reputation of others"). The receiver of the gossip, by assenting to listen, is expressing the same need for narcissistic satisfaction as the gossipers.

Gossip intensifies in times of cultural upheaval or chaos. The reason is simple: culture provides an ethos of order or predictability. Once a culture of whatever kind (e.g., family, business, congregational, national) significantly and rapidly disintegrates, people are no longer clear about their identity and power; they must now compete for status and power. Gossip is one way for them to achieve, at least fleetingly, personal well-being and superiority over others. Take the example of the prodigal son's brother. The prodigal son left home a self-centered adolescent but returned a mature adult, openly admitting his own weakness and begging forgiveness for his cruel rejection of his father. The prodigal son's brother is alarmed and envious of his brother's newfound mature relationship with his father. So he tries to gossip about his younger brother with his father, hoping through the aid of gossip to retrieve power over his father and his brother: "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property . . . you kill



the calf we have been fattening . . ." (Matt. 15:29). His father refuses to be party to the gossip.

In the contemporary world, in which cultures are in constant and disruptive change, gossip as a business operation has reached massive proportions. Scandal or gossip magazines, purporting to "tell all" about the rich, powerful, and famous, lock in on people's deep-seated need to experience power over others. In the secrecy of their rooms, readers can feel at once envious of and superior to the rich and powerful ("they may be rich and powerful, but I know all about them"). The reader experiences a passing satisfaction of having inside knowledge of, and thus some power over, others.

### **FRAGILE BONDING THROUGH GOSSIP**

The satisfaction and intimate alliances that come from being trusted to pass on gossip and to receive it are, however, very fragile. Because gossip is fundamentally a response to a narcissistic need for power over others, gossipers know deep down that they in turn can readily become objects of gossip spread by the very persons with whom they gossip. In the earlier example, the islanders were united in their dislike of government officials imposed on them by the dominant power, and the latter recognized this. However, the islanders themselves distrusted one another, often with considerable intensity. Because they had limited access to power and resources, they were always suspicious that fellow islanders were out to manipulate them to their disadvantage. So, through gossip, the islanders sought to express their envy of and desire to dominate one another, especially the more successful ones. The more scandalous the information, the more people sought to build up alliances or cliques of dependency through gossip. The more rapidly these alliances broke down, the greater the anger and sense of frustration among gossipers, and the greater the urge to develop more secure gossip alliances.

### **GOSSIP EXERTS SOCIAL CONTROL**

Since gossip is a conversation about social rules that are being or have been violated, it is a potent force in maintaining the status quo or conformity to a group's norms. Few people can withstand the consistent mockery of gossipers. In the example of the island people, a particularly disliked colonial bureaucrat became the target of increasingly malicious gossip, for he had gone beyond the bounds of tolerable behavior for an outsider. After a while he could no longer take the silences, stares, or ridiculing comments of the islanders, so he was forced to

leave the island. Of course, the government official could blame no particular person for the gossip, so court action for defamation was impossible.

This case study of the removal of a particularly objectionable colonial official illustrates that gossip can sometimes have a positive function. However, more commonly, gossip or the fear of it is not only destructive to an individual's reputation but also apt to inhibit or block any justified effort to change the status quo within a culture, even in the Western world. Sociologist Chie Nakane, writing on the way Japanese individuals are controlled by the fear of gossip within the group, notes, "The feeling that 'I must do this because A and B also do it' or 'they will laugh at me unless I do such-and-such' rules the life of the individual with greater force than any other consideration and thus has a deep effect on decision-making." In many cultures people often hesitate to introduce much-needed agricultural or health changes because they fear that gossip will socially isolate them and their families. I have seen people with innovative gifts tolerate near-starvation conditions in parts of the South Pacific with great agricultural potential, simply because they felt they could not withstand the consequences of the gossip that would have spread if they had dared to introduce better methods of cultivation. Particularly within traditional cultures, gossipers are thought to have the assistance, if they wish, of witchcraft powers. It is believed that gossipers can invoke secret magical forces to destroy or harm people daring to question the cultural status quo. Would-be innovators, believing in the world of magical powers, require enormous courage to withstand the wrath of "supernatural" forces generated against them through gossip. My own experience of situations of this kind is that few can withstand these pressures to conform to the old ways of doing things.

### **FROM GOSSIP TO SCAPEGOATING**

Gossip is the forerunner of witch hunting or scapegoating. Gossip is the liminal stage between private and public worlds, but scapegoating formally takes malicious feelings toward others from a world of shared secrets directly into the public arena. For example, the chief priests had been gossiping about Jesus and the dangers he presented to their status, but finally they came out into the open and formally named Jesus as the object of their scapegoating: "The chief priests answered [to Pilate], 'We have no king except Caesar' (John 19:16). Self-preservation motivated this scapegoating; as Caiaphas shrewdly said, 'It is better for one to die for the people' (John 18:14). Anthropologically, witch hunting is the sim-



plistic search for agent(s) to be branded as responsible for individual or community afflictions. It fulfills several functions: to explain for individuals and groups what cannot be understood, to control the uncontrollable, and to account for the problem of evil personally and in society. The inclination to blame other people for our own afflictions is a convenient way to avoid owning up to our own role in their development and to the accompanying guilt. Ernest Becker notes that scapegoating can evoke such fears for self-preservation that even friends are falsely (and often secretly) accused of misdeeds if this will prevent punishment for the scapegoaters. We have but to reflect on the secret police activity in the former East Germany to see to what extent fear and secrecy can go against family bonds and friendships. Little wonder that witch hunting transforms open societies into worlds of jealously guarded, fear-evoking secrets, in which truth, trust, and friendships are shattered.

## CHAOS TRIGGERS BLAMING

Anthropologists have discovered that this tendency to assign blame to others is particularly rife in times of cultural disintegration or chaos. Terms like witches, enemies of the people, political subversives or conspirators, and polluters of orthodoxy have been used throughout history to refer to individuals or groups who are branded as the causes of the cultural malaise. Mass scapegoating movements, panics, or crazes emerge out of the turmoil; putting aside the rules of rationality, people vengefully and simplistically search out and name people they believe cause their chaos. For example, there was the anti-Communist craze within the United States in the early 1950s under Senator Joseph McCarthy. The cultural and political climate within the United States was ripe for such witch hunting, because as Eastern Europe and parts of Asia had succumbed to oppressive Communist dictatorships, many Americans wondered about their own future as a free nation. McCarthyism caused suffering for thousands of innocent people, with the unquestioning cooperation of many politicians, the mass media, and millions of American citizens. Today, as Europe experiences high unemployment, people yearn for an explanation; ultra-Right and nationalistic movements flourish, accusing immigrants indiscriminately for the rise of unemployment.

Generally, marginalized peoples are particularly targeted in witch hunting movements. Those who fear that their political or socioeconomic power is being undermined direct their anger against these outcasts because it is believed that the latter are

seeking revenge for their socioeconomic and political powerlessness. In the social, economic, and religious turmoil of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries in Europe, the marginal people were especially Jews, women, and the poor; these people readily became the scapegoats for the fears of the frightened powerful in society. Little wonder that today immigrants and refugees (the mobile poor) in Western countries are being blamed for undermining the economies of those countries. And women remain objects of contemporary scapegoating. In fact, as Susan Faludi asserts in *Backlash*, antifeminist movements are bound to intensify as supporters of oppressive patriarchal power in cultures feel their status and power threatened and eroded through the campaign for women's rights. Of course, the dynamic also works the other way. That is, outcasts are tempted to simplify the reasons for their misery by blaming a powerful person or group.

The leaders of scapegoating crazes are people who are thought to have particular ability to name, ritually control, and punish society's enemies. Traditional cultures have different terms for these people, including *diviners*, *witch doctors*, and *shamans*. In Western cultures their equivalents can be populist religious or political leaders (e.g., Adolf Hitler; Vladimir Zhirinovskiy in today's Russia) or, on occasion, such sophisticated ritual leadership group activities as royal commissions (in British Commonwealth countries), political conventions, congressional hearings (e.g., during the McCarthy era), and state trials (under the Communist system). These individuals or leadership groups lock into the fears of people by skillfully and publicly identifying particular people as scapegoats to account for society's problems.

## SOME PASTORAL LESSONS

Recall that gossip especially flourishes during the upheaval of rapid cultural change; people are disoriented, and there is a strong urge to find simple causes for, and to control, the resulting malaise. The church itself, since Vatican II ended, is deeply affected by theological and cultural change, so the circumstances are right for leaders and evangelizers to become trapped in the negative dynamics of gossip and even scapegoating. The following case studies illustrate some ways in which gossip can paralyze innovative pastoral people.

### CASE 1: GOSSIP DE-ENERGIZES LEADER

A congregational leader challenged his province to put aside irrelevant pastoral methods of evange-



lizing and risk imaginatively new ways of preaching the gospel. To the leader's surprise, despite his frequent references to chapter documents in support of his actions, he was met not only with little support but also with covert resistance. He discovered an active gossiping campaign against him, in which he was the object of negative and untrue comments. The gossip aimed to discredit his leadership and those religious committed to radical changes in evangelizing. This puzzled him. He had been elected by a large majority, and religious spoke supportively of him in public, yet the widespread gossip campaign against him was paralyzing his leadership. He finally decided, with skilled facilitating assistance, to confront the province with his experience of the gossip's evil influence. Many religious were grateful for his intervention, as they then realized that they had unwittingly become part of the network of gossipers. One religious commented, "I did not realize what I had become trapped in. The leader's intervention shook me. At first I denied to myself I was a gossip, but then I realized that I had become seduced in its destructive force. Then I felt liberated with new apostolic energy and could actively support again the leader's work."

This case study describes, I think, a reasonably common experience: even well-intentioned people can become unknowingly trapped within gossip networks and lose their objectivity. The leader's wisdom was to recognize this and call the group back to reality by identifying and naming what was happening in the province as a result of gossip. He also recognized that he could not do this alone; he needed the professional assistance of facilitators.

## **CASE 2: STRUCTURES NEUTRALIZE GOSSIP**

A bishop, known for his concern with fostering imaginative pastoral responses to contemporary problems, had developed an informal and personalized style of leadership. Consequently, he downplayed the role of formal structures of administration (e.g., the diocesan senate). However, over time, the more creative evangelizers in the diocese began to feel marginalized by the bishop and fellow priests and religious as a consequence of the gossip against them. They lacked a formal forum in which to complain about this treatment, and the bishop had become personally unapproachable to them. Without being conscious of what was happening, the bishop had become part of a diocese-wide gossip network; people fearing the innovative changes of the creative evangelizers would frequently gossip to the bishop about "these dangerous change agents in the diocese." After several years the bishop became con-

cerned that his advocacy of innovative pastoral programs was having few results. By seeking the expertise of a communication consultant, he came to realize the corruptive force of gossip in the diocese and his own supportive role in it. He then reintroduced more formal communication and accountability structures to stop the pastoral effects of gossip.

In this case study the bishop made two mistakes, with unfortunate pastoral consequences. Because he adopted an excessively personalized style of leadership, he made himself too available to listen to the gossipers within his diocese. He felt he had a duty to do so. But because he downplayed the role of formal diocesan structures of communication, he had no way to check the authenticity of the information coming to him through the gossip. He came to believe the derogatory information passed to him about the apostolically innovative evangelizers and joined with others in marginalizing them. This case study offers three major lessons for leaders: gossip is seductive; make sure structures are in place that allow information to be constantly reality-tested; and utilize the expertise of consultants to assess the effectiveness of the communication and evaluation structures.

## **CASE 3: ANXIETY EVOKES SCAPEGOATING**

In advance of a provincial chapter, a professionally prepared survey had been disseminated for provincewide consumption and discussion. The survey pointed out the considerable gap between the province's rhetoric about the need to respond to the pastoral needs of minorities and the reality. The report indicated that all apostolates in the province were negligent in this matter, and this gave rise to considerable gossip directed at the researcher in an effort to undermine the report's credibility. At the chapter itself, a delegate formally condemned the report, without offering proof of his allegations. No one objected to this, so the chapter then turned to other issues on its agenda. Nothing was ever again heard of the report, and the researcher was never again asked to prepare material for the province.

This case study provides interesting lessons about the ways in which gossip begins and works. The delegates were so anxious about the changes that would affect their own apostolates and lives if the report's findings were adopted, that they escaped into gossip before and during the chapter in an effort to undermine the report's objectivity. The delegate who publicly condemned the report by claiming the researcher acted unprofessionally (though he offered no proof), transformed the gossip into



scapegoating. Not only did a group of rational people lose objectivity through participating in gossip and assenting to scapegoating, but even the chapter's moderators, whose task it was to challenge the chapter to be objective, became seduced by these events. They did not demand from the delegate objective proof for his condemnation of the report; they assented by their silence to the scapegoating of the researcher and his report.

The potential for gossiping and its public expression through scapegoating is within every human heart. Just as Adam, in the Genesis myth, tries to blame Eve for what has happened rather than admit his own role in the incident, each of us has the capacity to blame others for our afflictions and ignore our own role in them. Yet the commandment "You must not give false evidence against your fellow" (Deut. 5:20) applies to gossip and scapegoating. Jesus, pointing to gossip as a way of denying one's own faults, strongly condemns this social cancer because it prevents or obstructs prophetic people in our midst: "Hypocrite! Take the log out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:5). Gossip and scapegoating ultimately killed Jesus. They also kill creative initiatives for evangelization.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.  
(signed) James J. Gill, S.J., M.D., Editor-in-Chief



# A Hispanic Leader of Women Religious

## An Interview with Anita de Luna, M.C.D.P.



Anita de Luna grew up in a migrant family in Weslaco, a small town in south Texas that borders Mexico. The youngest child of nine, she was raised by her widowed mother. She became a Missionary Cate-

chist of Divine Providence in 1968. The community she joined ministered among the poor, and Anita came to admire their work in the labor camp in which she had lived as a child. Anita has a bachelor's degree from Our Lady of the Lake University of San Antonio, Texas, and master's degrees in religious studies and spirituality from other universities. She has done pastoral work among the poor in rural and inner-city settings. She credits her family's love for her and her community's investment in her development for what she has been able to accomplish.

**Anita de Luna:** I do come from very humble beginnings. Early in life I learned to share myself with others. Although I had few opportunities for development in childhood and adolescence, I did have a strong sense of being loved and was encouraged to become all I could become. My mother, brothers, and sisters made me believe I could do anything, probably because I was the last hope for the family, and I was the only high school graduate. I learned how to respond to challenges, and each challenge I succeeded in built a little more on my self-confidence and pushed me a bit further into leadership.

**HD:** Your congregation is unique. How do you see its mission today, and in what way does it connect with the issues of today's church and world?

**de Luna:** The Missionary Catechists of Divine Providence are all Mexican-Americans, not by choice but probably by destiny. We are second- and third-generation Americans of Mexican descent. We were recognized by the church in 1946 to do evangelization among Hispanics. I think that my community has been blessed with a ministry and an ethnicity that places us where we are most needed today.

First, the church is clearly calling us to a new evangelization. One characteristic of this newness is that the evangelizers are the poor. As we hear this call today, we remember that in the initial years of our founding we chose a ministry that was

**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT:** Anita, you are a Mexican-American woman of humble origins. How have you come to be a Missionary Catechist of Divine Providence, the superior general of the group, and the outgoing president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR)?



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## Vocation, formation, and ongoing development programs within our congregations need to reflect the reality that already points to a different future

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peripheral, and we were a marginalized people. We feel we have had a lot of practice in evangelizing and being evangelized by the poor. Since we were founded by a visionary and parented by the Sisters of Divine Providence, whose priority was education, we have received the benefits of education. Today we find ourselves in a key position to respond richly to this call to a new evangelization.

Second, in the church and in the world, Hispanics are quickly becoming the majority. Ministering among Hispanics and remaining close to our own families have allowed us to remain culturally authentic. We are bilingual and bicultural, and we can move in and out of both cultures with a certain amount of ease. The church and the world are both coming to the recognition that the *ambiente* (atmosphere) today calls for openness to diversity and inculturation. The painful experience of being a “hyphenated” race has developed in us certain skills and abilities that have prepared us to respond to this reality today.

**HD:** Two years ago you were elected as the incoming president of the LCWR, and you served as its president in 1992–93. It is the first time that a brown-skinned woman has stood as leader of the group. Is it merely a symbol, or is there significant change occurring within religious congregations in the United States?

**de Luna:** I believe there is significant awareness at this time within religious communities regarding the realities about minorities and the church. Change begins to happen with new awarenesses, and these come with experiences and time. Many women religious have had opportunities for immer-

sion, and that will be the beginning of a recognition of a new reality for them. Much has been written on the call to inculturate and embrace diversity, so there is hope that others will be gradually intellectually converted as more is clarified, reflected, and documented. Eventually, I hope all of us will have had the opportunity to be secure in our own cultures and grow beyond our limited ethnic boundaries in our hearts and in our attitudes.

I do not know if I will ever know for certain why I was elected. I want to believe that I had something to contribute, and the conference saw it. Although I would also be happy if the members of the conference voted me in only as a symbol, because symbols are very powerful and have the potential to have effects far beyond the present, into the future. I continue to see myself and other Hispanics who respond to invitations of leadership at this level as those whose contribution is to open the doors for others to follow. I believe it will still be generations before we see some dramatic changes.

**HD:** There is a statistical prediction that in the year 2020, more than half of the United States will be nonwhite. Religious congregations are today primarily “Anglo,” even though members may be working in diverse situations of culture and race. How do you interpret this scene?

**de Luna:** I am aware of the demographics. I am very concerned that these statistics are even more glaring when viewed within the church. We are looking at a Hispanic church in the very near future, and I am concerned that we do not have sufficient leadership development among our own Hispanics, and that we have not done a very good job in raising awarenesses among non-Hispanics regarding Hispanic issues or faith development. I see our black brothers and sisters having done a better job of articulating their reality and their needs to the dominant population. The Asians, though fewer in number, have also begun to have quite a bit of visibility and influence in a number of ways. Hispanics, although greater in number, have been far quieter, and perhaps less able to make their needs known and less visible as a diverse race. My own congregation recognizes the challenge to enable and to empower the voiceless to speak for themselves.

The challenge for all congregations preparing to exist past the year 2000 is to ready all current members and to recruit and train new membership in appropriate ways to minister within the future church. Vocation, formation, and ongoing development programs within our congregations need to reflect the reality that already points to a different future.



**HD:** Prejudice and bigotry are known realities in the United States. Have you seen them overtly expressed within the LCWR and/or other gatherings of church people, or is prejudice more subtle among professional religious?

**de Luna:** This is a very difficult question because prejudice, in my opinion, is sometimes a personal judgment call on a particular experience. I would say that prejudice manifests itself with a different face among the educated, and especially among religious. We are far too well trained to be blatant. I would also say that any large group or gathering of people would inevitably include some persons who are culturally biased or who, not knowing a particular culture, would believe in and operate on the basis of stereotypes. The LCWR, with over 900 members representing 88,000 religious, would be no exception.

There have been times when I have felt that my voice has not been heard. Sometimes I would have wanted to see some participants selected, or would have wanted to participate in some opportunities, but the criteria for participation or selection made it impossible. The criteria and standards for participation are still formulated by and for the dominant culture.

To the LCWR's credit, however, I would say that my election was on a first ballot by a wide margin of votes, and that by and large I have received affirmation and support. My gifts as a bilingual and bicultural person have been used. I am sure there must have been questions in members' minds as to whether a minority person could represent and lead a leadership conference with the caliber of women who are its members, and who are overwhelmingly white. I must admit that I too had my doubts, since this is my first experience of working with an organization that is almost totally white. The challenge in this kind of experience is to remain who one is and not to compromise oneself in order to fit with the majority. I believe I have remained who I am, and the effect of this experience of diversity will tell its tale in time.

**HD:** Gerald Arbuckle, S.M., in his book *Earthing the Gospel*, discusses the concept of inculturation, which he defines as a process of exchange: culture is critiqued by gospel, and as a result, culture is changed through the interaction, and the understanding of gospel is deepened. How does the religious, as the New Evangelizer, prepare himself or herself for inculturation?

**de Luna:** In doing some reflection, I have realized that inculturation is about attitudes. I believe the preparation begins with a desire to genuinely enter someone else's world and a willingness to learn from the experience of the unfamiliar. The experience of inculturation needs to be cushioned by a compassionate empathy that enables us to give to another those instruments and tools that have allowed us to become capable individuals in our own culture. Then we must be willing to share our influence and power with the other, because an obstacle to inculturation is the bias that "my culture is better than yours." It is critical that we be able to stand outside ourselves and join you in your world, and that requires a lot of humility. However, that is the gospel call: to bring justice and set captives free.

The New Evangelizer must be a person of openness and humble prayer. We have already learned from our past what an attitude of domination does to our evangelizing efforts; thus, the New Evangelizer must be ready to learn from those to be served. I believe one perfect model of God's alternative to the old evangelization is Our Lady of Guadalupe, "*Evangelizadora de Las Americas*." In her we see the option for the poor, the taking on of the culture and symbols of the oppressed, the empowerment of the marginalized to speak for themselves, and the genuine care for those to whom we are sent.

**HD:** What do you consider the most significant thing you learned personally as president of the LCWR?

**de Luna:** Most significant has been the recognition that I had a gift to place before the church on behalf of the marginalized and that the church, through the LCWR, called for it and found it acceptable. This has been an awesome call for me, very similar to that of Juan Diego of Guadalupe. To be lifted from a minority and requested to participate in leadership among the dominant culture is a very humbling and sacred experience. I had been accustomed to ministering in the Southwest of the United States, which is primarily Hispanic, so the experience of ministering among non-Hispanics has been an inculturation for me. It has given me an opportunity to practice my theories of leaving the familiar to listen and understand another culture's agendas.

*This interview was conducted for HUMAN DEVELOPMENT by Sister Brenda Hermann, M.S.B.T.*



# I Will Be True to You

*James Torrens, S.J.*

I  
"I will be true right to  
the finish line." "You?"

"You have my word." "Words!  
The fizzled children of promise."

"We'll shake on it. Put 'er there,  
firm." "Firm, that grip?!"

"Bring me a paper then, I'll sign."  
"You sign and the moon shines."

"I beg you, invest in me."  
"Bank simply upon you?"

"Poof goes my confidence, if not."  
"Only the false confidence goes."

II  
Please, make my yes mean yes.

Not a day fails  
its promise of sunrise.  
Turn me to my source.

Great God, I sit thumbing  
the register of your dealings.  
The book's immense with promise,  
and at the last chapter  
promise is made flesh.

Promise, root me in you,  
Flower from me.

all agreed to do something before the next meeting, and in my heart of hearts I have known how unlikely I was to follow through. I am conscious of leaning on a frail reed when I promise. Yet I am a person socialized to stability, predisposed to it.

What about the young who grow up today with a cornucopia of possibilities—the channel surfers and interactive shoppers? The modern person is one who insists on keeping the options open. Speak not to such a one of promises. When you promise something you choose one direction and close off others. In the atmosphere of "openness," the concept of "promise" seems pretty ominous.

When I taught in college and lived in the student dorms, resident assistants and others had outings and projects to organize. I noticed what would happen to their "best-laid plans" because it often happened to mine; lots of initial enthusiasm and many sign-ups, but when it came to the actual date, when students had to deliver on their pledge, only about 50 percent would do so. The organizers, especially for retreats and trips, would say, "All right, we'll make them pay such and such, so they will feel themselves involved." But this merely pushed the signees to buy their way out of commitments ("Okay, so I lose \$10 or \$20").

Weddings are the most frequent public instances of a promise. With what eagerness and hopefulness most young people take on the immense task of life-long companionship and collaboration. And what a short distance they can see ahead. How little they

**I**n my gloomier moments, I get to wondering how anyone can emit a promise, even one limited in scope, even one having to do with payment and service. What daring that seems to call for. As to making the long-term commitment—the solemn sort called vows—only babes in the woods would do that, my good sense tells me.

When I promise even something small, I know the difficulty of keeping up to the mark. I have been at planning sessions or committee meetings where we



recognize of even their own problematic side, their deficiencies likely to cause trouble.

"O! Youth!" exclaims the narrator of the Joseph Conrad story "Youth: A Narrative," recalling the thrill of his first nautical command—a coal scow that he had to get from England to Indonesia before the cargo all combusted spontaneously (he lost the battle in sight of the shore). Somehow the struggle exhilarated him. "Oh, the glamour of youth! Oh, the fire of it," says the narrator, an older man shaking his more sober head in humorous wonder. How do we dare take on such impossible things?

Today the bets are against any given marital union going the distance. This is immensely sad. The reasons are everywhere to seek, though this is not the place to do so. A starry-eyed approach to the altar, reliance on one's own integrity and follow-through, on one's own energy and decency and native kindness, come woefully short of the task at hand. The most peerless-looking couples are often the first to separate.

The context of sacrament is truly crucial for those pledging their love, even though the blessing can hardly conjure away the deficiencies each person brings. Matrimony is a sacrament precisely as a source of grace—the Lord's support and strength tendered daily to a couple striving, against obstacles, to give witness to the power of lasting love.

## THE GRACE OF PERSEVERANCE

I have to chuckle, recognizing how many of us pledged ourselves to God in religious life forty or so years ago at age 19. "O! Youth!" How could we presume? Many later came to the judgment, often enough correct, that they shouldn't have. As for ourselves, how grateful we are for what was once called the grace of perseverance—which is to say, the Lord's daily support. At age 19, how much bewilderment, how many developmental crises, how many challenges to courage and to initiative and to what Bernard Lonergan called an "appropriation" of the vowed life lay ahead. In our prayer, how much crying out to the Lord there would have to be, and how many "fear not" assurances in response. As for our former companions, how many of them, ideals still high, kept the deepest and most basic commitment, that to holy faith: "We will be true to thee till death."

Rabbi Harold Kushner, in *Who Needs God*, quotes William James, in his classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, as dividing religious people into the "once-born" and the "twice-born." As Kushner explains, "the once-born are people who sail through life without ever experiencing anything that shatters or complicates their faith." They may have financial reverses, problems with their children, and so forth,

but they always feel that a kindly God is controlling things. James's twice-born souls, on the other hand, are people who lose their faith and then regain a very different one. They come out with "a less cheerful, less confident, more realistic outlook. God is no longer the parent who keeps them safe and dry. He is the power that enables them to keep going in a stormy and dangerous world."

John Henry Newman, in his *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, chimed in on this subject under the provocative title "Promising Without Doing." Said Newman, "Our religious professions are at a far greater distance from our acting upon them than we ourselves are aware." Our naive assessment comes from our "mistaking good feelings for real religious principle." We are not properly conscious, he says, of the burden that hangs upon our will and tends to clog it.

Newman, in those pre-Catholic days, even spoke of "our corrupt nature"—an excessive concept, especially as applied to the baptized—but with astuteness he observed, "We can never answer how we shall act under new circumstances. A very little knowledge of life and of our own hearts will teach us this." So what shall we do? Venture nothing? Bury away our talent? No, indeed. But in our promising, we must depend constantly on the One who, as Newman puts it, "knoweth whereof we are made and alone can uphold us. . . . There can be no harm in professing much directly to God, because, while we speak, we know He sees through our professions, and takes them for what they really are, prayers."

"Help me be faithful" is what we say when promising before God. For the once-born that prayer takes on a certain perky tonality. The twice-born, saying the same thing, are holding on for dear life. Fifty years ago, perhaps, certain benign arrangements favored the once-born. The world works against them now in every way. This should not freeze up the capacity for promising, which is still precious, still at the heart of being human. As to those who once promised generously and now, still on the trail, look back from far along, marveling and exclaiming "O! Youth!" like Conrad's narrator, what words can fit their tempered awareness? A verse of the psalms, perhaps: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory" (Ps. 115).



Father James Torrens, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.



# Spirituality for Religious in Health Care Ministry

*Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.*

**W**hat do you want me to do for you?" The story in which Jesus asks this question is found in each of the synoptic gospels. In Matthew's gospel (20:32), the story involves two blind beggars; in Mark (10:51) and Luke (18:41), only one. The story is the same: Jesus is passing by, the blind man calls out, some people attempt to silence him, the calls grow louder. Jesus stops and asks, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man expresses the desire to be healed, and Jesus responds.

This question well reflects ministry in the health care professions, because it expresses a willingness to offer assistance or service. There is an openness about the question. It does not bring any expectations; it assumes we are willing to be surprised, to have our capabilities called upon and even challenged, to be led into the unknown. This willing and open response is a basic characteristic of the apostolic life; it is part of continuing the mission of Jesus.

These reflections will present some elements of apostolic spirituality—only some, because we really do not have a well-developed apostolic spirituality in the church, or even among religious, today. Even if a spirituality were fully articulated, we would not have a magic potion that would integrate all the loose ends of contemporary religious life. Still, such

a spirituality might help religious address the tensions created when ministry, prayer, and community are experienced as isolated from one another. In truth, these three cannot be separated, because they draw from the same pool of time and energy; they constitute a unified way of life.

I will focus on five elements of apostolic spirituality, particularly for religious in the health care professions. The reader's personal experience is an important and necessary lens through which to examine these reflections. My own experience of working with health care professionals and others in retreat and spiritual direction ministry has demonstrated to me that apostolic spirituality is affected and nuanced by the specific ministry out of which it emerges. Other ministries may have elements different from those noted here, but some elements are common to all ministries. Thus, ministers in other professional fields may recognize their experience within these elements, and health care professionals who are not apostolic religious may recognize something of their experience also.

## **PRIMACY OF THE MISSION OF JESUS**

What we do in religious life, what we profess and hope to do, is continue the mission of Jesus.



Throughout the history of religious life, that mission has appropriated a multitude of expressions involving a wide spectrum of ministries. At the outset, I want to distinguish between ministry and mission. Ministry is a specific activity; mission provides meaning and direction to that activity. For any activity to be ministry, it must reflect in some way the life and work and example of Jesus of Nazareth. Not every activity is ministry, regardless of how noble or humanitarian it may be. The identity of ministry is not grounded in the nature of the activity or even in its results, but in its continuation of Jesus' mission. Ministry is what we do; mission is why we do it. There are many ministries, but only one mission.

Health care professionals continue the mission of Jesus, in particular his healing mission. Jesus' work of healing is not adjunct to his life and example. Even a quick survey of the gospels gives evidence that healing is central to the work Jesus did among the people.

Seventy-one miracles are recounted in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. Forty-four are miracles of healing, either physical, emotional, or spiritual. Of the seventy-one miracles, seventeen could be described as general, having no precise description: for example, "Many began to believe in Jesus' name when they saw the signs he was doing" (John 2:23); "Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). Of the fifty-four specific miracles remaining, forty-four are healings. The point of this arithmetic is simply that extensive analyses and sophisticated theories are unnecessary to understand healing as integral to the mission of Jesus.

In religious life, ministry is often spoken of as continuing the mission of Jesus the Teacher, Preacher, Servant, Prophet, Shepherd, Priest, and Peacemaker. While we hear of Jesus the Healer, it is surprising this image is not used even more, given the condition of our world. Health care professionals must recognize their work as constitutive of Jesus' mission and must regularly remind themselves of that truth. Not everyone will see that connection; still, religious in the health care professions should be able to articulate it clearly.

## **PRACTICAL QUALITIES OF LIFE**

There are many qualities of life rooted in the example of Jesus. The qualities that emerge depend on the image of Jesus we use. While it may be said that all exemplary qualities are operative in Jesus all the time, some appear in a more pronounced way than others, depending on the immediate context. Three basic qualities are reflective of Jesus the Healer.

**Responsiveness.** Underlying Jesus' question, "What do you want me to do for you?" are the sensitivity, adaptability, and willingness that are basic building blocks for apostolic spirituality. Sensitivity to the situation at hand is essential if our response is to be effective. The alternative is that our response will have no effect and make no difference, or possibly that it will have a disruptive effect and make an unwanted difference. Adaptability to the situation as it changes is essential if our response is to be appropriate. The alternative is that our response becomes a patterned behavior, disconnected from the immediate reality around us. Willingness to be involved is essential if our response is to be consistent. The alternative is that we make no response, or that any response we do make is complacent.

The driving force of responsiveness is compassion. Too often, compassion is misinterpreted as pity. The true core of compassion is the urgency to act. Compassion never merely observes; it initiates and interacts. In Jesus' work, compassion is second only to love. Compassion calls Jesus to act for the good of the individuals and even the crowds he encounters. It will be no different for us; compassion urges us to respond to the needs of others for their good, not for our benefit. When our benefit becomes the primary goal, compassion gives way to conceit.

**Competence.** Competence shapes the overall effectiveness of our response. However sensitive and adaptable and willing that response, its lasting effect must reflect competence. Two realities that touch competence are involved in all ministries: material variables and personal variables.

Our level of competence is usually predicated on mastery of material variables. These variables differ from ministry to ministry, but they generally include some common elements: (1) a body of living knowledge ("living" because it is either growing, or at least changing, insofar as new information replaces old on a regular basis); (2) natural or acquired skills, enabling us to use that knowledge; (3) the willingness, capability, and commitment to acquire new or refined skills to match developments within our field of knowledge; and (4) resources of whatever kind, making it possible for us to use skills with knowledge. This is very often the variable over which we have the least control.

The amount of time and energy it takes to develop and maintain competence is directly proportional to the amount of change within these material variables. In the health care professions those variables change regularly, if not continuously; thus, maintaining competence in terms of the material variables demands a great deal of time and energy.



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## Our ministry becomes something less than a continuation of Jesus' mission if our efforts, however exact and effective, fail to confirm and affirm a person's self-worth

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Our sense of competence is affected by personal variables. These variables include the personalities, preferences, and predicaments of those to whom we minister. Material variables become ineffective when personal variables resist modification. While personal variables do not render a minister incompetent, they can create that feeling and give that perspective.

The driving force of competence is justice, a concept often referred to when good and evil are pitted against one another. From this perspective, justice is rooted in human dignity, so whatever compromises that dignity is an injustice. But there is another perspective on justice that directly touches competence more subtly than the conflict between good and evil. That perspective concerns the justice of preparation—that is, an informed readiness to minister. In practical terms, we know what we can do, and we know (as much as possible) what we cannot do. The justice of preparation demands that we not do what we cannot do. This does not mean we never strive to learn new skills and to enhance present ones, but it does mean that we do not compromise the welfare of others by attempting something we know little or nothing about.

**Respect.** Respect must be inherent in our responsiveness and our competence if compassion and justice are to be present and active. Respect is characterized by our recognition of each person's uniqueness; our affirmation of the dignity of each person, a dignity based in our creation as God's image and likeness; and our efforts to listen, communicate, and interact through ways and means consistent with that uniqueness and dignity.

Respect focuses our attention on the simple truth that ministry brings us to encounters and interactions with people. Respect reminds us that regardless of what we have to do in the work of healing, the value of a human being can never be compromised.

The driving force of respect is nothing less than love. This touches the very heart of the gospel, summarizing the entirety of Jesus' life and teaching. Our ministry becomes something less than a continuation of Jesus' mission if our efforts, however exact and effective, fail to confirm and affirm a person's self-worth.

Responsiveness, competence, and respect, as practical qualities for our apostolic life, remind us that through our ministry we continue the mission of Jesus. We must remind ourselves every day that our work is truly the Lord's work. That reminder is not a justification for complacency but an attentiveness to why we do what we do.

Working with patients—with people—allows us to touch the very means of our salvation. Jesus directly identifies himself with his followers, with people: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). Our God is an incarnational God; our ways and means of dealing with others are primary components for our transformation into the likeness of Jesus and, ultimately, for our salvation.

### SUPPORT SYSTEM NEEDED

We do not continue the mission of Jesus alone. We need and should draw on the support of others, just as they need and draw on our support. A support system provides perspective on our experience and helps us maintain perspective in ministry. The primary components of the support system for apostolic religious will be our continuing relationship with the Lord and with our friends—religious and nonreligious, within and without the health care professions.

A support system is always important, but most especially during times of feeling alienated from our religious community because (or apparently because) of the uniqueness of working in the health care field. There is no magic formula for addressing the situations of religious who are not in what are considered mainstream ministries of the community. There is no generic solution for dealing with feelings of disconnectedness from the flow of life within the community.

There is always the possibility that some community members will feel threatened by or envious of members who are physicians, not so much because



of their work as because of the extraordinariness of that work within religious life. And there is the possibility that some community members will believe that those in such extraordinary ministries really have no interest in community matters.

We cannot take responsibility for others' feelings and attitudes; to do so is almost to guarantee self-destruction, or at least to sabotage our self-worth. Awareness of and fidelity to our responsibilities is a healthier approach, and it safeguards against reactions and judgments based on misunderstanding, jealousy, mistrust, lack of information, or poor communication.

## RESPONSIBILITY IS MUTUAL

Yet we bear responsibility in our relationships with others. Of the many responsibilities within religious life, only two will be cited here: the community's responsibilities regarding our ministry, and our responsibilities to the community. In this context, the reference is only to personal responsibilities—that is, the relationship between a community of persons and the individual person, as distinct from legal or contractual or fiscal responsibilities.

The community's responsibilities are twofold. First, the community must commission members in the health care professions. This is not limited to the processes of granting permissions and funds for professional education, since some members were in the health care field before entrance to religious life. This commission has to do with the community's recognition of these members' gifts and skills as valuable and integral to the work of the church and the congregation. Second, the community must make members feel at home. Part of this is to know something of their actual work through community publications and other vehicles for regular communication of information about the members' lives and ministries; part of it is simply to provide a living environment of welcoming religious companions.

The individual's responsibilities are likewise twofold: (1) to stay informed of major concerns, events, and developments in the community's life, and to be visible and involved in that life as much as possible; and (2) to remain faithful to religious life as the ground of self-identity. This is not to imply any infidelity or laxity; it is a call to examine where one plants the feet of one's heart. Jesus reminds us, "Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Matt. 6:21). Where is my heart? Where do I root my identity? Ministry always offers a tempting framework for self-identification, particularly in these days when the identity and place of religious

life in the church are not clear. The challenge is to nurture our identity in the Lord through the heritage of our congregations.

In developing and maintaining a support system, in accepting our responsibilities, we must avoid bitterness when our expectations are not met. We must be able—always—to look at our religious life and know, "I'm happy with what I am," just as we must be able to say of our ministry, "I'm happy with what I do." If not, then some adjustment is needed.

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

We do not continue the mission of Jesus alone. We need to be in relationships that provide a support system, and we need to be in relationship with the Lord. Ministry, prayer, and community draw time and energy from the same pool; thus, it is not uncommon for religious to have difficulty putting adequate levels of desire and effort into their prayer and spiritual life. Four means are suggested for developing and maintaining a relationship with the Lord in the midst of ministerial demands.

**Believe.** Specifically, believe that the Lord is present and active in our daily work. Bring faith directly into everyday life and work. How? Use the images of Jesus that emerge from daily responsibilities. Who is the Jesus we meet through our work?

Images of Jesus that are foreign to our experience tend to separate ministry, prayer, and community, so competition for time and energy—rather than integration—becomes the dominant characteristic. For faith to become a natural part of everyday life, the Jesus in whom we believe must be an intimate part of that life.

**Pray.** Specifically, pray as we can, not as we cannot. When do we ever pray as we cannot? We can place unrealistic expectations upon ourselves concerning how we should pray or the amount of spiritual reading we should do. We need to ask if those expectations, as well as our self-image as prayerful persons, are truly realistic.

Pray as we can. The experiences and images from daily life are the primary ingredients for prayer. As with our images of Jesus, if our prayer is foreign to our ministerial experiences, its significance and practice can disappear or diminish or become mechanical, without meaning and motivation.

**Relax.** Specifically, place a high priority on practicing relaxation. Religious in general do not have a good track record in terms of taking care of themselves. The demands of ministry and the desire for exercise



or relaxation or taking a day off to pray or play compete for time and energy from the same pool. Many religious whose ministry is in the health care professions make taking care of themselves a low priority.

Relaxation is a means for developing and maintaining a relationship with the Lord. It is more difficult to be attentive to the Lord when we take little or no time for such attention or when fatigue is an underlying antiphon in our lives. How can we expect to see Jesus present and active in daily life and ministry unless we regularly take time to step back and look?

**Revel.** Specifically, recall frequently the joy of healing and the experiences of new life that happen in ministry. Take the time to revel in them and rejoice that they flow from the ministerial skills we bring to the church.

Difficulties and failures and painful times are part of any ministry; possibly, they are magnified in the health care professions. While we cannot pretend these experiences are not part of ministry, neither can we let such experiences strip us of the potential to bring joy into ministry. Cataloging moments of darkness and sorrow and disappointment is easy. By contrast, we must recall and bring to prayer times of light and joy and triumph.

"Believe, pray, relax, and revel" is a simple formula for developing and maintaining a relationship with the Lord. Complex components in this relationship are no guarantee of effectiveness or consistency. What we do to express our relationship with the Lord is not as significant as the fidelity with which we do it.

## **FRIENDS WITH THE CROSS**

It is inevitable that we will encounter the cross in ministry; the challenge for us is to make friends with it. The alternative is that we lose our ability to laugh and smile, to know and share joy, or that we live the fantasy and pretense that there is no pain and suffering in our world.

Many are the ways in which ministry brings us directly, and possibly regularly, into contact with the cross: the never-ending cycle of illness, especially among the poor; legal considerations and ethical implications related to the health care professions; shifting expectations and emotions in moving from patient to patient. The full array of emotions and expertise can be tapped in dealing with routine check-ups, minor injuries, unexpected conditions, terminal illnesses, sudden death. The ineffectiveness of our support system when people close to us do not understand or do not care; when we feel neglected or forgotten or isolated; when we feel powerless in dealing with situations and patients that cannot be

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**It is not okay to  
make mistakes  
in the health care  
professions, but  
it is okay to  
acknowledge our  
own pain**

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helped because of limited resources or undeveloped technology: these are a taste of the inevitability of encounters with the cross.

Personal experiences of the cross can become even more complex because of the understanding with which contemporary religious life approaches human weakness and failure among its members. Religious life has moved a great distance from inflexible rules, which responded to mistakes, and even to accidents, more by generating guilt than by cultivating compassion.

The policies and practices of religious congregations today take a more developmental approach to mistakes and failures than in previous eras. So as we confront the power of the cross, as we experience our own weakness, it is okay to make mistakes; the situation can be redeemed, possibly even reversed. There is always possibility for growth and new life. The environment of most congregations supports this continuing-development approach to members and ministries.

There is a potential for tension between this approach and the fact that it is not okay to make mistakes in the health care professions. Not every medical situation is a matter of life and death, but the milieu in which ministry in the health care professions takes place does not allow for a wide margin of mistakes or misjudgments.

It is not easy to make friends with the cross, but there are some practices that can support our efforts.

## **DISTINGUISH HEALING FROM CURING**

Healing has to do with quality of life, touching every dimension of personal life. Curing has to do



with removing identified disruptions in the soundness of physical or mental or emotional life functions.

On the one hand, a high quality of life may be restored and maintained through healing skills, without curing the person. Consider the story of the blind man of Bethsaida, from the gospel of Mark—the only account of progressive healing recorded in the gospels.

Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. Then he spat on his eyes, laid his hands upon him, and asked whether he could see anything. The man's sight began to come back, and he said, "I see people—but they look like trees walking around." Jesus laid his hands on the man's eyes again; the man looked hard; now he was cured and could see everything clearly. (8:22–25)

There is no way of knowing, but we can still ask: What was Jesus' more usual experience that fell between healing and curing? What is our experience of being able to restore some level of quality of life without being able to definitely cure?

On the other hand, a cure may be accomplished without reestablishing quality of life. Consider the story, also from Mark's gospel (5:1–20), of the Gerasene man with the unclean spirit—the only account in which Jesus does not permit someone to join his company of followers. The outline of the story is this: Jesus encounters a man who is clearly "possessed"; Jesus frees him from the "Legion" within, sending them into a nearby herd of pigs; the man returns to his right mind. Then, as the narrative tells us, "As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus would not let him: 'Go home to your own people and tell them what the Lord in mercy has done for you.'" From the perspective of distinguishing between healing and curing, this seems to be a cure, but it does not provide a quality of life necessary for immediate discipleship. What is the experience of achieving a cure without providing a corresponding enhancement in quality of life?

These questions are rhetorical, but if the distinction between healing and curing is not made, ministers can lose sight of the preciousness and the precariousness of life. That loss leads down the road of discouragement, especially when we encounter situations in which little or nothing can be done.

## ACKNOWLEDGE OUR PAIN

It is not okay to make mistakes in the health care professions, but it is okay to acknowledge our own pain. This does not mean that there will be a weighty emotional demonstration each time a difficult pa-

tient or situation awaits; it means that we are willing to accept and embrace our reactions in the face of human suffering.

We have only a limited capacity for experiencing frustration and disappointment without an outlet, and still remaining energetic and optimistic about our future effectiveness in ministry. We absorb some of the pain that patients experience. The effects of this absorption are cumulative unless there is some vehicle for acknowledging the pains, frustrations, and disappointments that are inescapable in the health care professions.

In Matthew's gospel, near the end of Jesus' ministry and after all that he has done and tried to do, he is saddened by the continuing intractability of the people: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, city that murders the prophets and stones the messengers sent to it! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but you would not let me" (23:37). It would make sense, at this point, if we saw Jesus simply giving up, walking out of town, and taking up carpentry work for the remainder of his life. He did his best, but it did not work. Jesus could content himself by saying, "There is no more to do; no more needs to be done." But he does not. Instead, he accepts the passion and death that bring salvation to us. This is the Jesus who greets the dawn of Easter.

We have many privileges in religious life, but we do not have the privilege of being discouraged in ministry. We must be people who communicate hope—not hope for healing or curing (which may be unjust if it is not realistic or true) but hope in human goodness and beauty, hope in a Creator God who loves us regardless of our experiences or the experiences of those we serve.

Acknowledging our pain is no panacea, but it is a partial safeguard against communicating discouragement and hopelessness in ministry. Facilitating this acknowledgment is one of the important functions of our support system. We will not always be able to communicate hope or to ensure an undisrupted quality of life, but that is not as important as our belief in human goodness and beauty and in a Creator/Redeemer/Spirit who loves us even when that love is imperceptible.

## LEARN FROM THE CROSS

The cross is a teacher, though not a particularly popular one. Too often the cross is viewed as something we would be better off without. Yet, by faith, we know the cross is the means to resurrection; it reflects the example Jesus left for his followers. That truth does not make the cross any easier to



understand or accept, but it does challenge us to decide what meaning and value we will place on our experiences of the cross.

The teachings of the cross are simple but extensive. First, the cross teaches us that we are not absolutely independent; we need the Lord, and we need one another. The cross is inevitable, but we need not carry it alone. The value of developing and maintaining a support system is clear. The alternative is to isolate ourselves, building a self-protective shell that speaks more of escapism than independence.

Second, the cross teaches us compassion, enabling us to understand the suffering of others. In the scriptures, compassion as an apostolic quality is second only to love. If we lose touch with the human experience, then we can hardly claim to be effective ministers; we can hardly profess to love as Jesus loved. The alternative is to deal with situations or symptoms, forgetting the human beings concerned.

Learning from the cross may not prove to be our favorite course in the school of life. If we are committed to following Jesus, then we cannot claim absolute independence. We are dependent on the Lord and interdependent with others. If we are committed to living the example of Jesus, then we must learn compassion. We must do what Jesus did to continue his mission; we must embrace the cross.

Distinguishing between healing and curing, acknowledging our pain, and learning from the cross are ways of making friends with the cross. The power of the cross enables us to be people of hope. Hope is inherent to the cross because it directs us toward the Resurrection, whether or not we perceive that. We may not be able to communicate hope in every situation, but we can be people of hope: hope that God will remain faithful to the promise of possibility, surprise, and new life; hope that God knows what is unfolding in life, even if we do not; hope that the will of God will be done, even when we have no evidence of that; hope that God is always present and active in life.

We must be people of hope because, in ministry, we may be the only sign of hope a person experiences. If we can be people of hope, then we can be people of joy. And if we can be people of joy, then Jesus' teaching is fulfilled in us: "I have taught you these things so my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete" (John 15:11).

## QUESTION IDENTIFIES SPIRITUALITY

These reflections began with the question from Jesus, which lies at the heart of apostolic spirituality: "What do you want me to do for you?" Other components may emerge from our individual experiences, but such a spirituality includes at least these five elements: Jesus' mission as the primary identity of and reason for ministry; practical qualities reflecting the example of Jesus; personal relationships that provide support and perspective; personal relationship with the Lord; and familiarity with the cross.

An apostolic spirituality calls us to answer some questions for ourselves personally, not theoretically: How does my ministry in health care continue the mission of Jesus? What personal qualities of life do I hold as priorities for myself in ministry? Who are the people in my support system? Do I call upon their support? Do I acknowledge that I need support? How do I maintain my relationship with the Lord, given the demands of my daily responsibilities? What is my usual pattern of confronting and responding to the cross? What can I do so my pattern of response will reflect more clearly the example of Jesus?

The command which I give to you today is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, "Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?" Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?" No, it is something very near to you, already in your mouths, already in your hearts; you have only to carry it out. (Deut. 30:11-14)

To continue the mission of Jesus, we have only to know it and carry it out. To continue the mission of Jesus, we have only to look for Jesus in our everyday responsibilities, hear the call within them, and respond. To continue the mission of Jesus, our life and presence and work among others must ask boldly, "What do you want me to do for you?"



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# Reducing Your Stress Over Clergy Misconduct

*Philip D. Cristantiello, Ph.D.*

**T**he distress of these times strains even the strong person. What currently plagues the priesthood affects not only perpetrators and victims but anyone aware of misconduct—the vocal and the silent, the intimately involved, those more distant.

Another statement on pedophilia and its variants is unnecessary. Of more timely interest is how seminarians and priests who are not the subject of investigations or indictments are faring. The series of public accusations and admissions of sexual abuse affects both the social climate of ministry and the morale of clergy and seminarians. Nor are the laity spared. Their reactions are not confined, as sensationalistic news reports would lead readers to believe, to outrage or proclamations of loss of faith. One needn't suffer a loss of belief to experience bewilderment, spiritual conflict, and social embarrassment about being a faithful church member. Laity suffer psychological strain as well as financial loss when dioceses are drained from paying damage awards. Public adversity has a private impact. Shocking public accusations incite widespread anxiety. Such anxiety produces confusion and may be transformed into blaming anger or righteous indignation. Many are unable to withhold judgment because they find it too difficult to absorb complex and

jolting events. Anxiously, they seek closure and relief. Attempts to achieve this are reflected in the tendency to offer testimonials either on behalf of or against the accused, despite the absence of complete information. Such behaviors provide little more than temporary and superficial relief from the disturbing event.

The current psychological milieu undermines confidence. It shows up in expressions of self-doubt ("Do I really know my priests?") and vocational uncertainty ("Will I be able to live this life without serious psychological harm to myself?"). People are shaken by witnessing the sad plight of those involved in cases of litigation. "You realize how personally this throws you," a mother lamented, "when you're faced with explaining things to your kids and non-Christian friends."

Rarely thought of are the seminarians and priests who privately fear that some imagined or real past indiscretion will come to light and expose them to the humiliating glare of public scrutiny and speculation. The prospect of such a happening arouses considerable anxiety. Unfortunately, this anxiety is often suppressed. In a tense, hypervigilant climate, many become fearful that even private sharing with friends is not possible without great risk.



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## While dioceses now have plans in place for formally responding to allegations of misconduct, individuals not in the spotlight cope largely on their own

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### THE NATURE OF STRESS

While dioceses now have plans in place for formally responding to allegations of misconduct, individuals not in the spotlight cope largely on their own. Private management of concerns often takes place without sufficient understanding of the nature of stress. This article addresses the basic nature of stress, typical reactions to it, and sensible management of distress.

"I love stress," someone declared; "It pumps me up." Well, stress is not always harmful. Some stress incites a pleasurable degree of excitement in our lives and arouses motivation to accomplish worthwhile projects. When stress is prolonged or chronic, however, with neither gratifying result nor release, the potential for harm arises. Stress that is mentally exhausting or physically damaging can also cause a psychological disorder and thus worsen a person's quality of life.

The onset of stress isn't always quick and evident; sometimes it is incremental and subtle. Furthermore, reactions depend not only on the severity of the stressor but also on the individual who experiences the event. Commonalities exist but fall within a spectrum of different reactions. Anyone watching a tight pennant race sees this illustrated in the varied responses of a team's players during tense moments. Some stand stiffly arched; others pace distractedly; some sit on the dugout bench, looking on impassively.

Some of the usual responses to reported events of clergy misconduct are *diversion* (e.g., immersion in work), *displacement* (e.g., targeting blame primarily on the media), *detachment* (e.g., "I'm not affected"),

and *denial* (e.g., "Things are not as bad as reported"; "This will all blow over"). Such defenses are not effective for long. Overwork wearies the spirit, eventually increasing personal vulnerability to stress. Blaming superficially provides a sense of security that causes have been identified, but it rarely produces a solution, so problems continue unabated. The protection afforded by detachment soon proves illusory in a culture of hyped communications. Denial crumbles as graphic evidence mounts over time.

It is no exaggeration to say that the current supply of stressors is excessive. When measures for coping with them become taxed, psychological equilibrium is strained. In some this surfaces as restless apprehensiveness, depressed mood, or misdirected and disproportionate outbursts of anger. The stressed subject or those who know that person begin thinking that an emotional crisis is under way or imminent. Worry worsens the situation. Clear perspective becomes essential.

### MAINTAINING YOUR EQUILIBRIUM

The thought of an emotional crisis is unsettling and personalized. For one person there may be concern that a career will be put at risk. Another becomes excessively self-critical, claiming "I'm losing it, coming apart." Some interpret a couple of setbacks as a sure sign of chronological decline. A sensible approach is not to overdiagnose subjective reactions and to understand the ordinariness of emotional crises. Here are perspectives to help keep things level. They apply whether one is newly ordained or a seasoned administrator, whether the stress arises out of the current climate of public revelations or from a singularly personal event that presents a challenge.

1. Each person's tolerance for stress is unique. What incites one leaves another unfazed. But everyone is subject to limits. Neither your limits nor a friend's are likely to match a hypothetical emotional statute of limitations. Seminarians, priests, and professionals are conditioned by training and public expectation to reflect exceptionally positive qualities. Because of this, signs of disruption or dysfunction are rarely accepted. One stands a better chance of keeping expectations realistic by bearing this in mind. It is important to accept the fact that competent normal persons experience emotional crises from time to time.
2. Emotional strain is most likely to occur when a situation presents this triad: (a) an event requires you to adapt, (b) you doubt your ability to respond effectively, and (c) you can't sidestep the



expectation or requirement that you deal with the event. Self-esteem and vocational or professional status seem to be on the line. This triad is the core of stress.

3. When you or someone you know is stressed by a disruptive event, don't be quick to conclude that you or your friend is weak, a "head case," or falling from the elite. An uncomfortable disruption of one's mental equanimity is usually temporary. One shouldn't peremptorily conclude that it is indicative of an underlying pathological condition.
4. When emotional disruptions occur, the important point is whether they will be resolved in a healthy, adaptive manner—that is, in a way that eventually helps the person carry on effectively and appropriately in the future. Poor adaptation leaves the individual with continuing similar vulnerabilities.
5. When one is going through a crisis, it is usually more fruitful to focus on "What can I do now?" than on "Is my vocation doing this to me?" or "What's happening to the priesthood?" The first question helps you to be proactive. The latter questions bog you down in blaming or pondering what is often unanswerable. If you find that you must pursue such questions, do it with friends who customarily function with balance.
6. An unheralded positive aspect of stress that deserves mention is that crises disrupt our usual defenses. This often positions us for new learning. And since motivation to end the discomfort is apt to be high, resistance to changing one's nonadaptive means of coping may lower. Strange are the ways of adversity; it appears to be objectionable yet brings valuable insights.
7. In difficult times it is appropriate to seek the help of others. If your choice of another is well made, you will not only find moral support; you may also make progress in understanding what is going on and assessing the relative merits of your alternatives. Insight needn't be, and rarely is, a privately arranged acquisition. A psychologist can help you clarify the precise nature of the stress and offer guidance on how you can fix the situation or, if the stressor cannot be eliminated, how you can desensitize yourself.

## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Four other perspectives help in coping with stress. The first seems rather obvious, but it is worth mentioning because its truth is commonly trivialized: Stress can't be totally avoided. Virtually everyone encounters stress in daily life. The objective is to keep stress (or as Hans Selyé would say, distress)

from building to excessive proportions. This is done by learning about stress and your individual way of responding to its discomforting effects.

Second, stress flows from perception. Alexander Pope's line "all looks yellow to the jaundiced eye" put it memorably. If looking at things one way does little else but set you off, then deliberately change your focus—perhaps with prayer, a longer view, or a leisure activity. Even a slight shift in the disposition of thought alters the severity of a stress response. The temporary respite allows your drained emotional reservoir to replenish itself.

Third, it is important to appreciate that change, even in the service of personal growth, isn't easy and requires committed effort. Because our defenses work for us, we become attached to them. Unfortunately, disruptive life events vary, while defenses tend to stay the same. Thus, a person may continue to rely upon denial despite mounting evidence that something is wrong. In short, clear sight is blurred by hope, and the person mistakenly thinks a situation calls for resolve when actually flexibility is needed. When defenses lose effectiveness, working through takes time.

Changing stresses often require that one undertake anew the inquiring role of student, reconsidering assumptions and perhaps risking unfamiliar but more appropriate behaviors. Sometimes it takes getting hit over the head to see this clearly. Should this jolt of enlightenment come too late, it is necessary to work on forgiving oneself. Good friends help assuage the blows to one's pride.

The fourth and final perspective relates to the aforementioned reference to forgiveness. Much self-disparagement stems from a subtle, underlying self-idealization that cannot be sustained in reality. Thus, it is not uncommon to find priests, seminarians, and other professionals periodically getting caught up in condemning themselves for their evident lack of perfection. At such times one experiences very little compassion for oneself. Stress increases because of the merciless self-criticism. It is possible to reduce the likelihood and intensity of this through a periodic and honest examination of one's personal requirements. It is not unusual to find that such expectations are likely to be most stringent when most subjective and when clothed in the guise, and the consequent untouchable status, of universal absolutes.

## AIDS TO SELF-EXAMINATION

If you are willing to initiate self-inquiry, here are some questions to begin with. They will help you to determine how stressed you are.



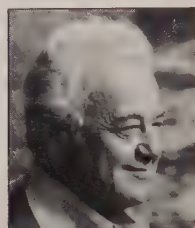
1. Am I feeling emotionally withdrawn from priests or colleagues with whom I previously felt open and at ease? Am I characteristically elusive with, and isolated from, brother priests or associates?
2. Do I avoid any discussion of topics related to abuse or anything else that would remind me of upsetting events? Am I directly or indirectly signaling others that the subject of sexual abuse is not to be brought up?
3. Is the memory of past incidents of inappropriate behavior frequently popping up in my thoughts? Do such thoughts contaminate prayer and meditation?
4. Am I impatient, dismissive, or angry with parishioners or relatives who ask about occurrences of sexual misconduct or the selection and formation of seminarians?
5. Is there a past event that I should bring to the attention of my spiritual director or a psychologist? Has avoidance of this responsibility been a hindrance to finding solace and estranged me from others and from my vocation?

Questions like these are apt to be discomfiting. But it is often more commendable to engage such

questions than to take comfort in knowing all the answers. By bearing adversity with an honest and courageous heart, we not only set a good example but also gain acquaintance with our own resilience.

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## Three Vitamins May Prevent Diseases

**S**cientific research conducted during the past several years has shown that a class of biological particles known as free radicals is related to a variety of serious physical illnesses, including arteriosclerosis, coronary heart disease, cancer, and stroke. These particles, also called oxidants, are generated as toxic products of the process by which cells use oxygen to maintain their normal functioning. They are chemical compounds that easily combine with and damage fats, proteins, and other substances in the body, thus setting the stage for consequent disease.

Among the readily available weapons for combating these destructive particles are three antioxidants: vitamins C and E and beta-carotene. All three are present in foods most people eat daily. Vitamin C is found in citrus fruits, tomatoes, strawberries, red and green peppers, broccoli, potatoes, cauliflower, cantaloupe, and brussels sprouts. Vitamin E is abundant in leafy greens, seeds, olives, nuts, vegetable oil, wheat germ, asparagus, and margarine. Sources of beta-carotene, which is converted to vitamin A in the body, are carrots, sweet potatoes, peaches, apricots, leafy greens, winter squash, broccoli, tomatoes, mangoes, and pink grapefruit.

These three vitamins protect the body from free radicals, which escape from cells and are also created by such environmental factors as tobacco smoke and radiation. Vitamins C and E and beta-carotene are currently believed by researchers to help prevent many kinds of cancer, including oral, esophageal, and reproductive. They are also thought to lower the risk of heart disease by reducing the buildup of plaque in coronary arteries. Vitamins C and E appear to block the development of cataracts. Moreover,

according to the *University of California at Berkeley Wellness Letter*, antioxidant vitamins may even delay some of the effects of aging.

The *Wellness Letter*—the largest health newsletter in the world—has begun its tenth year of publication by reminding its readers that ideally, a person's vitamins should come chiefly or entirely from foods and juices rather than from pills. "Supplements cannot *substitute* for a healthy diet," the *Letter* insists. Why not? Because "foods supply much else besides vitamins—minerals, fiber, carbohydrates, proteins, and fats, as well as elements we have not yet discovered." But in view of the fact that a recent government survey found that only 9 percent of Americans are eating the recommended minimum of five servings of fruits and vegetables (rich in antioxidants) each day, University of California scientists offer the following recommendations: "The first step is to eat a very healthy diet—at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily, six to eleven servings of grains (especially whole grains), two or three servings of low-fat or non-fat dairy products, and small servings of meat and fish. In addition, you should consider taking supplements of the antioxidant vitamins and, if you are a premenopausal woman, folacin (a B vitamin; also called folic acid)."

Vitamin supplements sometimes bring on undesirable side effects. For example, diarrhea or abdominal cramping can result from ingesting vitamin C; large doses of niacin (vitamin B<sub>3</sub>) may cause flushing, liver damage, and irregular heartbeat; and vitamin B<sub>6</sub> (pyridoxine), if taken in megadoses, can produce numbness and other neurological disorders. Vitamins A and D are also toxic in very large doses.



# Exploring Human Anger

Janet Malone, C.N.D., Ed.D.

**T**he title of Carol Tavris's book *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* captures succinctly how most of us have been socialized and educated regarding anger. Because we have misunderstood its necessity and usefulness, we have not been able to express it in healthy and constructive ways.

In this article I contextualize anger within the larger realm of emotions, highlighting its physiological aspects. I define anger, noting its causes, sources, and functions, and summarize some of the destructive anger-response patterns familiar to most of us. I delineate a conceptual model for exploring anger, a model consisting of what I call the four A's of anger management (awareness, acceptance, analysis, and appropriate action). Also, I interface this model with the constructive anger-response strategies of cognitive repatterning, cognitive rehearsal, and cognitive self-talk for "after," "before," and "during" anger situations, respectively. Finally, I discuss forgiveness and reconciliation, integral to self-empowerment and anger management.

## PHYSIOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

An emotion can be described as a complex pattern of autonomic (sympathetic) nervous system responses involving all body systems. In the case of

painful emotions, the ensuing visceral and somatic changes, as well as the concomitant motor activity, prepare us, in essence, for fight or flight.

A cluster of physiological components, basically the same for every emotion, is integral to an emotional response. As Tavris points out in *Anger*, it can include any composite of the following: increase of adrenaline and noradrenaline in the bloodstream, dilation or constriction of the pupils, increased heart rate, sweaty palms, controlled or released sphincters, and redirection of the blood from one part of the body to another (e.g., resulting in cold hands and feet, or flushed cheeks and burning ears).

## RATIONALITY OF EMOTIONS

Because the body's physiological response to a stimulus is basically the same for all emotions, it is essential for us to know which emotion we are experiencing. I call this the rational aspect of our emotions. In other words, a human emotion, because of this interpretive component, is distinct and different from a basic stimulus-response instinct or reflex. A human emotion comprises both the physiological and the psychological (rational). As such, it is under our conscious control, despite our socialization and education to the contrary, and also



despite a habitual, somewhat fixed, knee-jerk anger-response pattern most of us “unconsciously” use when angry.

## POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Having highlighted the physiological and psychological correlates of an emotion, I want to note another distinction related to emotions before focusing specifically on the emotion of anger.

Generally speaking, at least in the Western world, we speak of positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions include joy, love, and peace; negative emotions include anger, sorrow, and shame. This dualistic approach to emotions may help elucidate why the so-called negative emotions are so difficult, at least for some of us, and hence repressed or suppressed. In addition, there are varying degrees of pain associated with the so-called negative emotions, also affecting how we view and handle them.

## DEFINITION OF ANGER

In an effort to highlight anger as a human, rational emotion, I define it as a psychophysiological response to a perceived personal or social hurt or injustice. As a rational emotion, anger requires judgment and choice. This definition attempts to offset Darwin’s and Freud’s limited definitions of anger as a biological reflex and as an unconscious aggressive instinct, respectively. Highlighting anger as a human emotion moves it out of the realm of total reflex and instinct and into our conscious control. It is in the rational interpretation of the physiological components of any emotion that we learn to name that emotion—a first step toward moving it into our conscious control as rational beings.

## CAUSES OF ANGER

The causes of our anger at both the personal and public levels of our being include perceived hurt, physical harm, psychological harm, unmet needs and expectations, violations of our rights, and attacks on our self-esteem.

Some important distinctions must be made about the causes of anger. First, anger is an internal response to a stimulus. It is crucial to note that anger is a response to a *perceived* hurt or frustration. Our own particular interpretation of the physiological energy in our bodies determines that we are angry. Therefore, we are the authors of our own anger. No one else can make us feel anger; we must own it ourselves.

Likewise, we are not responsible for another per-

son’s anger. Granted, as social beings, we do not act in a vacuum; we are responsible for our words and actions. But we are not responsible for another’s interpretation of our words and actions. Thus, when a person responds to us with anger, it is his or her own doing, not ours.

Second, our particular interpretations and responses to any given stimulus come out of our own set of values, beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, biases, and prejudices. We each bring our own personalized baggage to this interpretation. Anger is a response to a *perceived* hurt or a *perceived* personal or social injustice. In other words, although anger seems to be a response to an external stimulus, most often it is an internal event. Our own negative interpretation of a particular stimulus often leads us to make ourselves angry.

On another level we readily recognize the truism that different people have different interpretations of the same stimuli. For example, when several people who have experienced the same event are asked to interpret it, it is rare for any two of them to interpret it in the same way.

The same is true for anger. What arouses anger in one person may not do so in another. Thus, we must be aware of what predispositions we bring to bear on the interpretation of our anger. We must name our anger norms and taboos, which come from our families, organizations, church, and society. As Tavis notes, “Anger is not an inevitable consequence of arousal but an acquired one. . . . anger is generated and reduced by how we interpret the world and the events that happen to us.”

## SOURCES OF ANGER

The sources of most of our anger arise out of relationships in which there is some type of intimacy and interdependence. We become angry with parents, partners, siblings, friends, and colleagues. Anger can arise in professional and social or church situations in which there is interdependence, or at times dependence, because of an unequal balance of power. Anger occurs when we have been hurt by significant others in our lives, whether personally, professionally, societally, or ecclesiastically.

## PURPOSES OF ANGER

Anger functions primarily as a signal that something is amiss. Etymologically, *anger* is derived from the Old Norse word *angr*, meaning distress. It is usually considered a secondary emotion rather than a primary one because it is distress caused by a perceived physical or psychological hurt or injustice.



Anger, as a secondary emotion, is only the tip of the iceberg. When we experience anger it is helpful to ask ourselves, "What would I be feeling right now if I weren't feeling angry?" Such a question can help us discover the primary emotions of hurt, frustration, or feelings of self-diminution, and thus the cause of our anger.

Anger, like all the other emotions, physiologically generates significant energy; the body is prepared for action, for a shift. When our response to it is healthy, anger can be a creative force for change. Sometimes, however, our responses to anger are unhealthy.

## UNHEALTHY RESPONSES TO ANGER

Unhealthy and sometimes even destructive responses to anger occur when the bottom line is resentment. Such anger responses as vengeance and retaliation suggest that we are going to even the score. We unequivocally demand that the other person change or act according to our expectations and values, with the self-righteous assumption that we don't have to change at all. These anger responses rarely, if ever, have any lasting effects.

Because of our general ignorance about the psychophysiological nature of anger as a human emotion, we may harbor ambivalence toward it, as illustrated by such common negative synonyms for *angry* as *annoyed*, *ticked off*, *put out*, and *frustrated*. In addition, any socialization, education, and religious training we have received regarding anger may exacerbate our ambivalence toward it and, consequently, our unhealthy responses to it.

Interestingly, however, we have all recognized in others, and only to a lesser degree in ourselves, the walking time bomb, the volcano about to erupt; we have all noticed the sharp or strident edge that anger puts in the voice. Many of us deny the anger in our own lives. We are ignorant regarding its necessity; we are also ignorant of its positive effects when constructively expressed. As a result, many of us are limited when it comes to healthy anger responses. Taking an inventory of our usual anger-response patterns can help clarify our preferences, learned in most cases from significant others during our childhood.

Many times, we are seemingly left with limited options for handling our anger, such as denying it or ignoring ("stuffing") it through repression or suppression. Such responses can aggravate the physiological component of anger, because despite our emotional response, the body is still ready for action—fight or flight. In "A Threat to Christian Communities: Angry People Acting Passive-Aggressively"

(HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, Winter 1984), Robert J. Wicks notes that unhealthy anger responses come out of our ambivalence toward anger and our consequent repression or suppression of it, which can have potentially long-term and deleterious physical and psychological consequences. Research I have done supports the theory that we can pay a high price for ignoring the buildup of anger in our bodies.

Unhealthy anger-response patterns can be covert or overt. Covert anger that is somatized can result in addictions to alcohol or other substances, sex, food, shopping, work, or intellectual or spiritual "fixes." The unhealthy covert handling of anger can also result in physical and psychological ailments such as colitis, ulcers, migraines, voice loss, high blood pressure, insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression, boredom, and passive-aggressiveness. This is not to ignore the other causes of these ailments but to point out the interrelatedness of cause and effect in us as holistic beings. The unhealthy overt expression of anger may take shape as physical and/or psychological aggression, including violence, open hostility, displaced hostility, projection, transference, passive-aggressiveness, sarcasm, and caustic humor.

## ANGER MANAGEMENT STAGES

The four A's of anger management are awareness, acceptance, analysis, and appropriate action. In delineating these stages, I am using constructs only to help describe our efforts to manage anger. It is important to recognize that these stages are not mutually exclusive and discrete in our lived experience, nor do they occur in a sequential or linear fashion. Indeed, I suggest that we experience anger and its management as a helical process in which we repeatedly pass through the stages in a spiraling fashion, each time with more insight and experience, so that the circles become smaller and smaller until the "still point" of transformation is reached.

The four-A's model describes an approach to our lived experiences that may help us become more self-empowered in the management of our anger. It takes reeducation, time, and practice (trial and error) to change unhealthy anger patterns to healthy ones, but change can and does occur when people learn and use new concepts and skills for handling anger.

**Awareness.** In order to do anything with our emotions, we must be aware of them. Awareness necessitates that we recognize the physiological components of our emotions in our bodies—at times a



gargantuan task, especially for individuals to whom this is an unfamiliar concept. We must be able to detect and name our personal physiological patterns of reaction to stimuli (e.g., increased heart rate, sweaty palms, increased shallow breathing, tightening in the throat).

A parallel step is the naming of our emotions—a prerequisite for their differentiated and appropriate management (i.e., one's approaches to the management of anger, fear, and joy may be very different).

**Acceptance.** Once we are aware that the emotion of anger is our response to a particular stimulus, the next step is acceptance of that anger in ourselves. Ultimately, each of us is the author of his or her own anger, no matter what the stimulus. In our reeducation regarding this emotion, we have to move from "You made me angry" to "I am angry."

If we accept ownership of our emotions, we regain personal control over our lives and thus become ready to empower ourselves in taking responsibility for our emotions.

**Analysis.** Having become aware that we are angry, and having accepted that we are angry, we can analyze the causes, sources, and functions of our anger. To help get at the root of anger, I suggest asking oneself, "If I were not feeling anger right now, what would I be feeling?" In answering that question, we see into the depths of the causes, sources, and functions of our anger through our own perceptual lenses (e.g., I am angry because of what my boss said to me at today's meeting; it made me feel not accepted, or diminished as a person). Such analysis is equally important in societal or cultural situations that we perceive as unjust and unfair (e.g., as a female, I am angry because I didn't receive the salary increase I requested, which my male counterpart did receive; it makes me feel inferior to men doing comparable work).

The purpose of this analysis is to help us determine what we are going to do about our anger. How are we going to express it? We determine the person- and context-contingent pros and cons of overt or covert constructive expression of our anger. In certain cases anger can be constructively handled without overt expression. Covert expression of anger, one of the number of strategies we have at our disposal to handle anger, can be a healthy expression of anger. It is important to note, however, that covert expression of anger as an only and habitual strategy that is not consciously chosen can be an unhealthy expression of this emotion. As such, the covert expression of anger is a "lateral" expression of the emotion in subtle yet destructive ways.

In some cases anger management may include seeking advice from another person. This can be especially helpful if we have taken time out in the actual anger (and conflict) situation to regain control and perspective.

**Appropriate Action.** The last stage of anger management is actually handling the anger through some form of expression. This can happen before, during, or after any of the earlier stages. Expressing anger within these time frames is contextualized within the following discussion of healthy responses to anger.

## HEALTHY RESPONSES TO ANGER

Healthy management of our anger includes respecting all the parties involved. It takes into account our own personal need to empower ourselves, or to vindicate ourselves from a perceived hurt or injustice, as well as the importance of respecting the other person(s). There is no room for resentment, revenge, or retaliation in the healthy management of anger. The bottom line is vindication rather than vengeance.

Healthy responses to anger arise from a repertoire of responses that are person- and context-contingent. We become aware of, and accept, our anger; we analyze its sources, causes, and functions; we make a choice about how to express it; and we take the appropriate action.

At times we may decide to overtly express our anger, but on some occasions we wisely choose not to do so. Making a conscious choice not to overtly express our anger yet empowering ourselves to release its energy buildup in constructive ways can be a rational means of handling anger and achieving a sense of closure.

## COGNITIVE ANGER MANAGEMENT

Anger is both a psychological and physiological emotion; it consists of both emotionality and rationality. Thus, it is important to release the physiological energy of anger as well as to use our rationality in expressing anger. A repertoire of strategies including physical release of anger energy as well as cognitive repatterning, cognitive rehearsal, and cognitive self-talk may be used after, before, or during the process of anger management (the order in which they are used by many people in the course of reeducation regarding anger).

**After.** The technique of cognitive repatterning is what I call our "postmortem" strategy in anger man-



agement. On the one hand, postmortems are familiar to many of us, in that we have replayed in our minds particular situations involving anger or conflict. However, postmortems can be negative if they function simply to solidify our resentment, cynicism, despair, or desire for retaliation or revenge, or to deepen a pervasive unhappiness with ourselves and others.

A way to use our postmortems positively is to engage in cognitive repatterning—replaying the anger situation in a personal inner drama in which we re-script that situation with a new dialogue empowering to both sides. In this way we can cognitively repattern the anger situation, thus making a negative experience into a positive one. In doing so we empower ourselves and give ourselves practice in healthy anger management in a safe context. Such repatterning helps us replace unhealthy anger responses with healthy and constructive ones.

One technique of cognitive repatterning is the “empty chair” exercise, in which we sit facing a chair that represents the other principal involved in the anger situation and replay the dialogue, this time handling our anger in such a way as to empower ourselves while respecting the other person.

Another cognitive repatterning technique is writing a letter regarding the situation to the other person involved (as an exercise only, not to be sent) and then writing a letter of “response” from that person. This is a variation of journal keeping or poetry writing, which can also be useful pathways to changing unhealthy responses to healthy ones.

**Before.** Another effective way to handle our anger in difficult situations is to prepare for those situations in advance through cognitive rehearsals that include the dialogue for each party involved. Needless to say, we can never predict what will happen in an actual situation, but in cognitive rehearsal we can prepare ourselves to respond constructively. We can practice receiving feedback by active listening, restating, reflecting, reframing, and asking for clarification. At the same time we can practice giving feedback in constructive “I” messages, based on Thomas Gordon’s work in parent effectiveness training.

“I” messages have three parts: (1) *I feel* [my particular emotion] (2) *when* [specific concrete event or action] (3) *because* [tangible effect on me]. For example, “I felt angry when you came late for the meeting today because it made me feel like my time was not important.” The crux of “I” messages is to empower ourselves in sharing our own vulnerability, our own reaction to a particular action. “I” messages are not used to change the other person

according to our expectations and values (which, of course, are based on our perceptions, biases, and prejudices).

Although we can never totally prepare for all the eventualities in a difficult situation, there is still something to be said for preparing ourselves, because in so doing we can change our counterproductive mindsets, free ourselves from entrenched positions, and increase our openness to meeting mutual needs and interests and engaging in creative problem solving.

**During.** In the process of anger management, the goal is to learn how to handle anger constructively as it arises. As noted, practice in cognitive repatterning and cognitive rehearsal can help us prepare to do this. In addition, during an actual anger situation, a useful technique is cognitive self-talk—an ongoing inner dialogue that can occur within the actual situation. For example, we could slow ourselves down with such internal messages as “OK, easy does it,” “Slow down, count to ten,” “Breathe deeply,” “Keep your cool; you can handle this,” or “Keep quiet and listen; you don’t know all the facts.”

We may also see, in our instantaneous flash of awareness, acceptance, and analysis of our anger, that with this person, in this context, and at this time, the most appropriate action is to take time out, give the other party feedback in “I” messages, or pursue some other anger-management strategy.

The essence of healthy anger management is consciously making choices and being responsible for our anger. It can also enable us to give others the space to express their anger and not take it on as ours, even if others say to us, “You made me angry.”

## PHYSICAL EXPRESSION OF ANGER

We may decide not to express our anger in a given situation but to physically release the energy of that anger in a safe context through sports or other non-violent activities, such as walking, jogging, running, swimming, baking, cleaning, ironing, or rearranging furniture.

Personally, I have great reservations about some of the more aggressive anger-release techniques, such as “ventilation therapy” or pounding and hitting a replica of the target person or a neutral object. The purpose of any anger-release technique should be to help us gain control. There is evidence, however, that the more aggressive techniques actually increase rather than decrease the pent-up energy. As in our society at large, so too in our handling of our personal anger: violence begets violence.



Different types of relaxation techniques, some appropriate for use within the actual anger situation and some for use after the fact, can facilitate the nonviolent release of anger energy. Within the actual situation, deep breathing, counting to ten, or taking "time out" to regain control can be helpful. After the fact, useful relaxation techniques include yoga, guided imagery and visualization, listening to music, and watching a movie.

Through time and practice, with cognitive repatterning, cognitive rehearsal, and cognitive self-talk integrated with awareness, acceptance, analysis, and appropriate action, we can come to perceive our anger as less threatening and learn how to use its energy creatively.

A good test of how constructively we manage our anger is whether we continue to "burp it up" after the fact. Some of our anger-related metaphors reflect how anger can simmer inside us: "You make my blood boil," "She was seething with rage," "He was blowing off steam," "They blew their stacks." If the anger is still gnawing at us and adversely affecting our ability to focus on other things, then something is amiss in our handling of it.

## **FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION**

No discussion of anger management would be complete without a mention of forgiveness and reconciliation. Although we often use these words interchangeably, I would suggest that forgiveness differs from reconciliation in that it comes from one person (i.e., the person hurt), whereas reconciliation is a reciprocal forgiveness and healing.

Forgiveness and reconciliation do not entail the repression or suppression of anger and its underlying hurt. They assume a conscious management of anger, not an attitude of "praying the anger away." They are a challenge to move beyond a social or religious training that has cited anger as something to be expunged from our lives.

In our reeducation regarding anger, it is important to recall what Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians: "Be angry, but sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Anger is essential in our lives; it is its unhealthy management that is problematic and, at times, sinful. Consider, for instance, Christ overturning the tables of the money changers and chasing them out of the temple in Matthew 21:12-13. His words and actions clearly indicate that he was angry. "Be angry, but sin not": What better model for us to follow?

Jesus is our model for expressing our anger, but in Matthew 18:21-23 he is also our model regarding

the necessity of forgiveness. He challenged us to forgive each other not seven times, as Peter suggested, but "seventy times seven"—in other words, countless times.

Forgiveness entails giving up our resentment against others and giving up our desire to punish, retaliate, or get revenge. We who have been hurt are the ones to forgive, to let go—not those whom we are forgiving. The challenge—indeed, the essence—of forgiveness is that we forgive others unconditionally. That is, we do not forgive others on the condition that they change their behavior according to our values and expectations. We have no control over others' responses, but in choosing to forgive others, we establish control over our own responses. Thus, in forgiving others we empower ourselves.

On the other hand, reconciliation is a reciprocal coming together again; a mutual movement away from resentment, revenge, and retaliation and toward forgiveness; a healing of hurts and a rebuilding of trust. When the reciprocity of forgiving and accepting forgiveness occurs in reconciliation, the first steps toward mutual empowerment have begun. Paul speaks of reconciliation, of mutual forgiveness and empowerment, in Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind and tenderhearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you."

Essentially, our challenge is to befriend the anger present in each of our lives and to use it for creative change. Christ is our model, and Paul's words to the Ephesians are our guide: "Be angry, but sin not."

## **RECOMMENDED READING**

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# Religious Life in the Year 2000

*Carl Koch, F.S.C., D.A.*

**I** don't have the foresight of a seer, and for that I am eternally thankful. Handling life one day at a time serves me fine, thank you. Having said that, I would be lying if I claimed that I do not sometimes ponder the future. My reactions swing from calm repose to nervous fear. Looking toward the future reminds me of the old adage about the difference between the optimist and the pessimist: the optimist says that a glass is half full, and the pessimist claims that the same glass is half empty. At times my future looks half full, at other times half empty.

Writing about the future of religious life is also a lot like writing science fiction. The sci-fi writer looks at what is happening in the present and asks, If this development is taken to its extreme, what will happen? In considering the future of religious communities, I propose to ask, If certain things are happening now, what will be going on in ten years?

As a framework for this article, I will present six scenarios. In each one, the narrator is a Brother who is 55 years old. (I chose a Brother because I happen to be one; the stories will probably have resonance for most religious.) The narrator reflects on his work, his community, and where his life seems to be heading. For convenience, I have imagined that the narrator has just been pondering the upcoming year and has formulated his goals in a letter

to his provincial. After each scene, I pose some questions that the reader or a community may wish to use for reflection and/or discussion.

## **TOM**

Tom could barely contain his anger. Slamming the door to his bedroom, he flopped into his easy chair. The community had just met. The results slapped Tom in the face again. His proposal to move the time of evening prayer to a later hour had been voted down for the third straight year.

"Damn it," he grumbled. As at many other times in recent months, a torrent of frustrating thoughts surged through his mind. "Jerry and I are the only ones left at school, yet these old guys don't seem to care that the schedule excludes us—not that I care a lot to go to office so I can dash through what these guys call prayer. So I don't go. But then they complain to the provincial.

"Maybe I'll go work with Dan at X. But that would leave Jerry the only Brother in the school. Might as well, though. He'll be the only one soon enough. The board runs things pretty well. The money they save from my salary doesn't amount to a hill of beans.

"If I hear old Cal gripe again about how dirty the school is, now that the seculars are in charge, I'll



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## More parishes lacked full-time priests and, strapped for money, the diocese could not hire enough pastoral administrators

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lose it. He casts his cataracts at me like it's my fault. What am I supposed to do? It isn't our school any more. When are these guys going to realize that?

"I'm beat. It's dumb to think I can fix everything. If only the development office wouldn't keep honking about this being a dinosaur or a freak, a dying breed to point at while people say, 'Oh, look, a real live Brother. They say there used to be five or six. He's the last, I think.'"

"I like the kids, though. Religion department's super. Lucky we found enough religion teachers this year. I'm worried if we have to replace Jenny next year. Nobody's coming out of college in religious ed. Some kids are interested in religion, but most? I don't know. I wonder.

"Maybe Jerry and I could move out? But I'd hate to leave Phil with nobody to drive him to football games. Hope I'm that lively at 88. Wish more of these old fellows were like him. Maybe I could hang in there then."

The phone's insistent ringing brought Tom out of his musings. He'd been expecting a call from Meg and Terry, a married couple who regularly invited him over for food or a friendly visit. Tom felt like a member of their family; they treated him that way. Tom was godfather to their son, Timmy, now eleven.

Sure enough, Terry's growling voice burst over the phone. "Tom, get over here! We've got more lasagna than an army could eat. Besides, Timmy wants to show you his report card."

"Don't know. Last time I came over, you almost had to wheel me home in a wheelbarrow, I ate so much . . . Well, for Timmy, okay. Want me to bring anything?"

"No. But get here quick. I'm hungry." As usual, Terry just hung up. That's the way he was.

Tom smiled as he changed into his jeans. He could put his frustrations away for awhile. Between Meg, Terry, and Timmy, he had no time for useless speculations about what seemed a vague future.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How real does this scenario seem to you? Is it common in your community already? Will it become more likely, or common, in ten years?
- Are the frustrations Tom experiences with his community a result of selfishness, or does being one of the few active members of a community present genuine difficulties and disappointments?
- Tom clearly finds rejuvenation with Meg and Terry. Will the locus of interpersonal support for religious come more and more from friends outside the community? How do you feel about this?

### KEVIN

Kevin's apartment smelled of fried sausage and fresh coffee. Mary and Liz had just left. They had been a great gift to him over the last two years. Their Sunday brunches with him after mass provided support—support he sometimes used to get from his community of Brothers. Since moving to Tucson, Arizona, to become diocesan director of religious education, Kevin had adjusted well to living alone. Periods of loneliness sometimes hit him on weekends. Holidays were the worst. On the other hand, he often relished the privacy. He could eat, sleep, pray, work at his computer, or visit with friends, all at will, without bothering anyone or being bothered.

Kevin had developed other friendships, but Mary and Liz, a Franciscan and a Dominican, respectively, formed his community. They could talk about most topics and, since neither woman worked for the diocese, he felt free to vent his ire about his job if and when he needed to. The only thing he still lacked was a spiritual director, but finding one seemed next to impossible. Liz would be good in that role, but she was community and friend.

After cleaning up the dishes from brunch, Kevin sat down at his computer and began writing a letter to his provincial. Larry was new as provincial and, despite the province's staffing only four schools now, still had the mindset that all the Brothers should live together and "make themselves available to the province." Indeed, Larry had gotten elected because the retired Brothers, who were in the majority, wanted someone who would pull things together.



So, while not wanting to sound too defensive, Kevin sought to make clear to Larry that his job with the diocese was consistent with the founder's vision and that his life-style was reasonably simple, celibate, and obedient to God's will.

After the usual opening pleasantries, Kevin wrote: "My apostolic goal for this year is to oversee effectively the religious education projects of the diocese in both schools and parishes. As a 'catechist by vocation,' with a focus on the poor, I am particularly concerned about the shortage of Hispanic religious educators. So I will begin a parish-by-parish recruiting and training program for volunteers, with emphasis on largely Hispanic parishes. Also, I want to continue the close cooperation of my office with that of youth ministry because in the Hispanic community, the most effective religious education has to be done by youth ministers and those working with families. I feel good that over the last two years I've been able to do a lot of training. The parish programs are far better managed and more effective (see letter from the bishop, enclosed).

"My community—Mary, Liz, and me—will continue this year. We meet weekly for Sunday mass, brunch, shared prayer, and good, supportive talk. I feel additional support and affirmation from the women and men with whom I work. In addition, I have made several important friends in the local community. I will continue working with the retreat committee for the province.

"As for prayer and spiritual life, I try to meditate daily for an hour, usually with spiritual reading included. Mass is a problem because of my traveling to priestless parishes, but I manage twice a week, on average. I'm still looking for a spiritual director. Someone recommended a woman who works at a spirituality center. She's new, so I've not been in contact yet.

"I continue to work out at the Y when I can, and I walk as often as possible, no matter where I am. My last physical was okay, but I have to watch my glucose levels.

"My work for the diocese and the life I've made here suit me quite well. It's nice to make community with new folks. I miss some of my friends in the province, but we stay in touch. I'll probably take a vacation with Matt over Christmas, and I'll see some Brothers when I go to a meeting in Houston."

Kevin had never dreamed, thirty years earlier, that he would be living alone, far from the nearest Brothers' community. But he considered his work important. He had learned to form a community, certainly as supportive as some of the ones he'd lived in with the Brothers. He wondered just how long he would like his situation, but he decided to cross that bridge when he came to it.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What are your feelings and reactions about Kevin's life-style?
- In living alone, is Kevin carrying his share of responsibility to the rest of his province? Should he bear more responsibility for the other Brothers, especially the older men?

## ERIC

As Eric looked at his calendar for the next few months, he realized that it was jammed with commitments. The spirituality center had become busier. Part of the increase in work was the result of the ministry training programs the center had taken on at the request of the diocese. More parishes lacked full-time priests and, strapped for money, the diocese could not hire enough pastoral administrators. As a result the center had begun running programs to form spiritual directors, liturgical coordinators, social justice ministers, and so on. The support groups for people with AIDS met at the center, as well as other groups. In addition, the center had a full round of retreats, days of recollection, and workshops. Looking at his calendar again, Eric was shocked to find that he had only a week to pull together his two-day "Bodymind" retreat.

Despite the bustle of activity and the attendant stress, Eric smiled when he considered what Paula, Bess, Mac, and he had built over the last three years. Solid accomplishment proved a balm for his spirits after five frustrating years in vocation and formation work for his district. The only part of that job that had pleased him was recruiting lay volunteers for work in foreign countries or in poor communities. Even so, many Brothers seemed to expect that he could pull vocations to the community out of a hat. At last he had quit, knowing that to stay in the work any longer might jeopardize at least his vocation, if not also his sanity.

Fortunately, Eric's provincial had encouraged him to take his time about finding a place to use his skills. While he was looking, Eric became a licensed massage therapist and learned t'ai chi ch'uan. He had too little time to do massage therapy now but kept in practice with a few clients. When at last he got the job at the Franciscan Spirituality Center, he knew that God had led him to the best spot.

The work provided a good mix of challenge and service, and the community formed by the staff seemed almost too nice. Paula, the Franciscan Sister who headed the center, coordinated the place in such a competent, open-minded, consultative way that Eric thanked God for her every day. Her health

had suffered in the last year, and Eric worried about her. He had never met a wiser, more spiritual person. The other members of the staff, Bess and Mac, had met each other in the Peace Corps. They had finished their terms, married, and put each other through graduate school in ministry. They still had much to learn about patience, but Eric shared their enthusiasm and enjoyed the challenge of their vision for a more just and honest church. At meetings the four of them attempted to reach consensus. Sometimes the decision-making process dragged on and on, but when discernment ended, the four of them knew that the course they chose was the best possible (not that such deliberations didn't drive Eric mad at times).

Another responsibility that filled out Eric's calendar even more was his job as regional director. Since his district had combined with three others, and since the Brothers had spread out to more places and in smaller communities, his province had organized regional communities. Every other month the ten Brothers who lived within a radius of 100 miles would get together for prayer, discussion, and relaxation. Most of the men showed up. Eric suspected that he was elected regional director because he lived in the center of his region and because the spirituality center had room for the get-togethers. He'd been pondering the idea of having a workshop on Julian of Norwich at the next gathering but wondered if the Brothers wouldn't prefer something simpler. The fact that the Brothers participated willingly in their shared prayer encouraged Eric. Whatever program he organized for the gathering would probably be appreciated.

The only cloud on the horizon for Eric was the prospect of the rising provincial tax. As more men retired or became incapacitated, the costs of care rose to staggering levels. Only 30 percent of the province members held paying jobs. The salary from the Center was admittedly low. He could make more money as a pastoral administrator or in several other positions that he had turned down. He kept wondering if he should find something more lucrative. Yet his apostolate did a lot of good, he loved the community, and his talents were put to full use. He prayed that Providence would care for them all.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- A premise of this story is that working with other communities and with married couples in full partnership will become common. Do you think this is a valid presumption? If so, how do you feel about it?

- Religious may have to start searching for higher-paying jobs or use salary as the most important criteria in choosing a job (in some instances this is already the case). What do you think about this?

## AARON

"Pete, it's a waste of my time and the district's money. The men just aren't out there. How many years of this farce are we going to continue? Besides, I just can't take it. So I quit. Plain and simple."

"That's nice for you. But what about the province?"

"Look, the guys in the province have about as much interest in talking to men about the Brothers as they do in root canal work. They don't give a damn; at least they don't give me any signs they do."

"The guys at the college have students over and have worked hard at it."

"Oh, all right. And what have we got? Nothing! Some of these guys are still living in the days when admission requirements meant nothing more than being able to turn the doorknob."

"You're not being fair. Lou is doing well."

"Okay, I admit that. What I find weird is that they want men who will take their place at the college, but they recruit a guy like Lou, who wants to work at a soup kitchen. Then they gripe when nobody comes in. I still get the line, 'Well, anyone coming in this year?' Can you imagine? After all these years, I still hear that."

"What do you expect? Some of them feel as if their life's work is going down the drain."

"Fine. Then let them take my job."

"I'll take my bat and ball and go home, eh?"

"We don't need recruiters, or whatever you want to call what I do. We don't need vocation or formation people, because even when we do get a guy, he's as old as I am. Hildegard, De La Salle, Francis, and Teresa didn't have recruiters cruising around talking to Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes, college retreatants, volunteers. They got on with life and the work. If they came, they came. It's about time we did the same thing. Maybe this is where we're supposed to be—dying. Maybe we should just get used to the idea. Make whoopee to the grave."

"That's too flip."

"Or is it just realistic? Either way, I'm done."

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Given our current situation with new people entering religious life—or, more honestly, not entering it—should we ask people to recruit for religious communities?



- What do you think of Aaron's argument that since Hildegard and the others did not have recruiters but relied on Providence, we should do the same?
- Is Aaron being too flip and unfair about the situation?

## ALEX

One of the major concerns Alex had when he moved into his new job a year ago was the prospect of living with Tim and Sam. He liked both men, but he knew that everyone else who had lived with them had moved out frustrated and, in one or two instances, angry. As he had been told several times, "Tim and Sam are like a married couple. They really do love each other, even after fifteen years together." While Alex didn't appreciate the sometimes sneering way this was said, he couldn't fail to comprehend the intent.

Nonetheless, Alex had prepared to do parish ministry in a bilingual setting. His Spanish was almost colloquial, and after two years in Guatemala, he believed that he had some feel for Hispanic culture. When the new job opened up, it looked ideal. He would be working with an established team. They could teach him a lot and, with his extensive work in religious education, he would add a key ingredient to the team.

Tim and Sam enthusiastically supported Alex's ministry. Since they lived in the inner city and were committed to ministry among poor people, they understood his work. Tim was principal of an inner-city Catholic grade school that served three parish communities. For the last five years Sam had directed the diocesan ministry to people with AIDS. Alex valued their work and appreciated their support and understanding because, even after all the documents from general chapters, many Brothers still believed that all Brothers should be in schools.

Although the three of them prayed together, talked freely, shared many common goals, and got on well as a group, Alex sometimes felt like a third wheel. He recognized that he would always hover outside Tim and Sam's relationship—not unwanted, but never completely welcome.

This state of affairs left Alex in a quandary. Part of him almost envied the intimacy Tim and Sam had. One man almost knew what the other was going to say before he said it. Alex could not fault them for their generosity, zeal, faith, or love. Tim ran a great elementary school. Parents helped out all the time, and this year kids filled the school to capacity. Tim's genuine love for "his kids" manifested itself in small and large ways all the time. Sam's faith and hope impressed Alex continually. Fairly often, people

with AIDS, their friends, families, or lovers who needed a place to stay for a while lived at the house. Sam competently took care of them with kindness and ready cheerfulness. That Sam could remain so steady and energetic after years of the funerals of so many friends and acquaintances inspired Alex. But part of Alex resented his permanent place on the periphery of Sam and Tim's relationship.

Nevertheless, his job in the parish had taken fire. Alex loved the people, and they reciprocated with great affection for him and enthusiasm for his projects. Tim and Sam joined him each Sunday for liturgy at his parish. They loved the music and affirmed what he was doing. Alex scolded himself for being unfair to Tim and Sam. After all, he'd lived in other communities where it was every man for himself.

Last August at the province gathering, a Brother known for his sarcasm had quipped that Alex must be getting his eyes opened to the "gay life" of his new community. Alex was nettled and found himself on the defensive. His retort managed to humiliate the cynic, but he wondered if the heat of his response and his defensiveness didn't betray his own frustration with Tim and Sam. Did he "protest too much"?

So now, in early September, Alex wondered if he should verbalize his concerns and frustration to Tim and Sam. Would they feel that he was criticizing their relationship? What could they do, anyway? They certainly weren't going to grow cold to each other just to make him feel better. He would definitely not talk to the provincial about it. The provincial's homophobia was the stuff of legend.

For now, Alex decided, I'll let it be. Why challenge love? He had friends of his own. He could manage.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Is Alex being too demanding of, or too resigned to, the relationship of Tim and Sam?
- Are relationships like Tim and Sam's to be envied or discouraged?
- What do we do with our need for inclusivity in the face of our need for intimacy? Have Tim and Sam found a balance?
- If you were Alex, what would you do?

## HERMAN

*Saint Jude High School Community—Herman Jacobs, correspondent.* We started our community's year with a retreat at Snow Lake. Bill missed practices with his JV football squad but managed to make all the meetings. He said that he could afford only one day away from his coaching duties. Despite rolling past age 60 this June,

Bill can still roar out "instructions" and be heard in the next block. Our faithful director, Andre, led us through the drill to prepare ourselves for the year. Andre will once again head the religion department, teaching full-time and working with the newspaper. Last year his journalists won the citywide contest. He's working to repeat the accomplishment. Phil spent the summer around school, painting, cutting grass, and readying the bookstore. He's still complaining about the high cost of books. Willy, our fearless principal, has been running around making money for us. This year's auction should be the best ever. One of the donors has already put up a vintage Toyota Camry as a prize. Herman has his seniors exploring the mysteries of modern literature and writing, writing, writing. He's had to wean some of his students back to basic word processing and away from voice processing because papers come out too disjointed when spoken into the computer. Herman managed to find money to send a dozen surplus computers to the Brothers overseas.

We won our first football game over Loyola, 21-13—the first time we've beaten them in four years. The fall play will be a musical nobody has ever heard of, but Andre assures us that it will be done with enthusiasm. The volleyballers are winless. Have a good year, and drop in when you're in town.

Herman shook his head as he finished proofreading his community's contribution to the province newsletter. The upbeat tone disturbed him. It sounded hollow. He wondered if its content represented the sum total of their life together as Brothers. "Is this all there is to us?" he whispered into the darkness of his room.

In recent days Herman's nagging doubts about community life had been irrepressible. The Brothers stayed so busy in their individual worlds of jobs and relationships that they never seemed to connect with one another. At dinner that night they had talked about Joe Kave, a sophomore whose mother had been arrested for busting a boyfriend over the head with a pool cue. Joe had caused a first-year teacher fits on the second day of class. Then the conversation switched to the usual complaints about Jim Lewis, the janitor, who had slopped soapy water over two kids' feet when they tried to walk across the commons floor. Herman had an eerie sense of déjà vu. He was coming to believe that they would still be squawking about the same things in five years, when he was 60.

The community members got along okay, but Herman wondered if okay was enough for him anymore. Despite years of prayer workshops, retreats, and renewal programs, the Brothers tended to rush through prayer, which usually consisted of a hackneyed hymn, too many readings, and choral mumbling of a psalm or two. When did they ever talk

about matters of consequence? Sports, some superficial talk of politics, the kids, Brothers' gossip—that was the sum total of their community discussions.

A dullness invaded Herman when he considered the remaining years of his life in the community. His best Brother-friends were scattered all over or had left long ago. Two were dead, casualties of overwork. True, Herman liked teaching. He knew he was effective. He felt a certain security about his identity as a Brother. So why this nagging worry and slow invasion of doubt?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Is Herman's case the most typical of all the cases in this article?
- Do you think his situation is painted too bleakly or too optimistically? Realistically or unrealistically? Why?

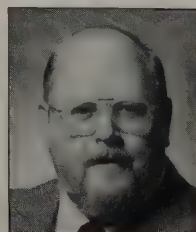
## CONCERN ABOUT COMMUNITY

Obviously, some of my own prejudices and worries are exposed in these scenarios. For instance, I may appear to blame retired Brothers for the conflicts some of these men are caught in. That is not my intent. I simply think that in ten years, a 55-year-old Brother like our narrator is going to be faced with these situations.

Also, I have tried to picture men who are, at heart, rather optimistic about their ministries and their lives in general. The central problem—and I realized this only after I had finished writing the scenarios—is community. When I look at what I have written, I suppose I betray some serious concerns that what it means to be "a member of a community" or "a religious community" will be even more complex and pressing questions than they are today. As our jobs and living styles diversify further, what will it mean to "belong" to a congregation? I wish I had answers instead of questions, but I don't.

## FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Create your own scenario for the year 2000. Discuss it with your community.



Brother Carl Koch, F.S.C., D.A., is adjunct professor of English and human development at St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota. He writes and edits books, including *Praying with John Baptist de La Salle* and *The Catholic Church: Wisdom, Mission, and Journey*, for Saint Mary's Press.



# Theological Reflection on Inner-City Ministry

*Richard G. Malloy, S.J.*

**M**ark Aita, S.J., M.D., is a big man with big dreams and the determination and collaborative nature to make those dreams come true. As a young Jesuit novice in 1968, he watched inner-city Baltimore erupt with riots. As he reflected and prayed, he had a vision of the Jesuit Urban Service Team (JUST), a group of Jesuits and colleagues who would put their brains and hearts, talent and money, lives and learning and love at the service of their needful brothers and sisters in urban America. Fourteen years later, in 1982, Father Mark's dream took flesh as the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus began a mission to and with the largely Hispanic population of North Camden, New Jersey. Jesuits, women religious (especially the Sisters of St. Joseph, who have been at the Holy Name Church and School for eighty-five years, and the School Sisters of Notre Dame), and laypeople have joined together over the past ten years to make Holy Name, St. Luke's Medical Center, and Legal Services for the Poor a vibrant eucharistic, educational, healing, and transformative presence in the poorest neighborhood of one of the most economically disadvantaged cities in the United States.

## **JESUIT MISSION ESTABLISHED**

In 1982 Jesuit Fathers Dave Stokes, Jeff Burton, and Jesus Calvo arrived in North Camden. Father

Jeff, the new pastor, was wandering around the streets near the church, looking for the rectory. A young boy named Miguel Rupert took Jeff by the hand and led him to his new home. Jeff, a dynamo whose greatest weakness is his passion for the hapless Baltimore Orioles, quickly formed a team of ministers who made Holy Name a happy and lively presence in North Camden. In the early 1980s—joined by Father Mark Aita and Sister Marie De Sales, S.S.N.D., who began to get St. Luke's Medical Clinic off the ground; by Father Jack Barron, a newly ordained Jesuit skilled in Hispanic and urban ministry; and by Sister Linda Stilling, S.S.N.D., arguably the most effective parish priest Holy Name has ever had—Father Jeff began to let shine the light of Christ through the celebrations and crises of North Camden.

## **LITTLE FOUND ATTRACTIVE**

The city of Camden is a place in need of the gospel's transformative power. Its population of 87,492 is 53 percent black, 31 percent Hispanic, and 14 percent white; 50 percent of Camdenites are under 25 years of age. Camden is home to 30,000 children, 67 percent of whom live in poverty (the highest percentage in the United States). The New York shipyards there used to employ 35,000 workers. Today there are only 35,000 jobs in the entire city, and



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most of them go to nonresidents. The Campbell Soup Company, which lays off white-collar workers at an alarming rate, despite having recently enjoyed its highest quarter earnings ever, shut down its canning operation in Camden over three years ago. Camden has over three thousand abandoned houses, two hundred liquor stores, one chain supermarket, and no movie theater, skating rink, or bowling alley. The murder rate is five times the national average. Camden's entire property wealth (\$250 million) is worth less than one Atlantic City casino. Fifty-five million gallons of county sewage pour into Camden daily, wafting an aroma that blurs the eyes and sours the stomach. Across the river from Philadelphia, this "Diamond [in the rough] on the Delaware" hosts two state-of-the-art jails, the county trash incinerator, and the odiferous county sewage plant—all institutions foisted on Camden over the past twenty years.

The new \$52 million State Aquarium costs \$8.50 to enter and, in spite of record attendance, claims to be losing money. Therefore, Camden receives no direct benefits from that institution, which operates on the city's waterfront. Recent statistics indicate that per capita income in North Camden is \$4,500, as opposed to \$18,714 in New Jersey. Most North Camden residents are not going to visit the aquarium anytime soon. Nor do they enjoy in their neighborhoods the security, peace, and quiet found at the well-guarded aquarium (where \$1 million is spent on security each year). The fish are much safer than North Camden's kids. Finally, in North Camden \$3,500 is spent on each third grader's education; meanwhile, in Princeton, New Jersey, \$7,714 is lavished on the education of each elementary school pupil.

Upon entering into this situation, the JUST team began to listen for what God desired of them in North Camden. Father Jeff, a "people person," made Holy Name a welcome place, especially for neighborhood youth. Jesus Calvo, S.J., tirelessly visited hospitals, attended board of education meetings, and immersed himself in the rough-and-tumble world of the city's local politics. Jack Barron, S.J., inspired the struggle against the plague that most directly threatens the life and well-being of Camden-area residents—the deadly infiltration of drugs into city neighborhoods, an invasion fueled by suburbanites' lust for chemical highs. While the 1980s wheeled and dealed America, from the machinations of the paper palaces on Wall Street to the insanity of the savings and loan scandal, the JUST team established a competent and caring medical clinic staffed by Mark Aita, S.J., M.D., and Bill Foley, S.J., M.D., a pediatrician who left a prestigious teaching position at Tufts University to serve North Camden's children with his medical skills. As Reaganomics took the country for a ride, Sister Linda Stilling was striding the streets of North Camden, getting to know everyone and everything in the neighborhood, from Doña Juanita's diabetes to Don Jose's loss of a \$6.00-an-hour job. Sister Linda (known by all as *La Hermana*) organized thirty-five women into an extremely successful Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program that welcomes three hundred and fifty children into Holy Name each Sunday morning for an hour they truly love.

Holy Name School addresses the multiple difficulties caused in young peoples' lives by grinding poverty and bewildering cultural change. In most grades at least one Spanish-speaking child begins to learn English as a second language. The Sisters of St. Joseph, including Dorothy "Nagle" Crowley, S.S.J., the wonderland wizard of first grade, and Joan MacMeniman, S.S.J., beloved ruler of the eighth graders' turf, led by principal Dorothy Prettyman, S.S.J., directly touch the future of 225 young lives each day. Helen Cole, S.S.J., combines studies in social work at Rutgers-Camden with full-time teaching in the second grade. A host of lay teachers, including the spirited Enid Rivera, the spunky and intrepid Kim MacNamara, and the serene sixth-grade matriarch Marge Hull, create an educational atmosphere of learning and love. From the "Bobo stories" and the "I'm Good, I'm Good" song, told and sung by Rick Malloy, S.J., to the gym classes run by Jesuit volunteers like Jim Brennan, Tim Stockert, and Noel Dunn, Holy Name School strives to instill in the children the truths that they are loved by God



and have the right and responsibility to grow up happy and healthy and holy and free.

A multitude of activities for youth keeps Holy Name hopping. Various Jesuit volunteers have staffed the Holy Name Youth Group, which has meant salvation for hundreds of teens. One young North Camdenite, Eddie Ruiz, is today a volunteer at the Jesuit Dolores Mission in Los Angeles. Holy Name Little League inspired the formation of four other leagues in Camden. As in the experience of the early apostles, God appears near waters, and members of Father Rick's Fishing Club wonder why a certain priest has such incredible luck catching bass.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION DESCRIBED

As the ten-year anniversary of the Jesuit presence in North Camden approached in the spring of 1992, the staff members of the various Jesuit ministries in North Camden began to gather for a year-long process of theological reflection. Theological reflection is a communal, graced process of communication by which we become more aware of how we are going toward God and away from God in our lives and ministries. It is the ongoing telling of our story so that we are better able to write the next chapter.

Theological reflection is theology (conversing about God and God's action in our lives) done for personal and social transformation. It is not just therapeutic; it is positively transformational. It is not simply planning; it is prophetically reading the signs of the times. It is not only social analysis; it is theologically interpreting social structures and processes, as well as our communal and personal responses to them. A process of theological reflection helps us be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible—the transcendental precepts of Jesuit Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*. Authentically striving to be faithful to those precepts leads to progress on personal and corporate levels. The unauthentic in our ministries and lives leads to decline. The prayerful, conversational process of theological reflection leads us personally and corporately to conversion on the intellectual, moral, and religious levels—conversion from the unauthentic to the authentic, from the biased to the intelligent, from the selfish to the self-giving. Ultimately, theological reflection and conversion lead to our being more loving, and thus more effective, agents of the justice (i.e., right relationships) of God's reign.

In order to truly love, Ignatian apostles hold paradoxes and conflicts in creative tension without allowing them to devolve into destructive polarities.

Theological reflection enables us to better know the paradoxes and conflicts, the consolations and desolations, the authenticity and unauthenticity of our lives, and such knowledge is the first step in being drawn beyond our limitations and gracefully transcending hindrances and hesitations. To transcend unto God, we desire to know who we are, with whom we are, where we are, and where we are going.

## SHARING THE ENTERPRISE

What happened as laywomen, Sisters, and Jesuit priests took two hours a month for several months simply to share what ministry at Holy Name means to them? Extraordinarily rich insight into our lives and ministry emerged from those conversations. As we shared how life at Holy Name had affected us as individuals and listened to responses from our colleagues, we witnessed the Word made flesh among us.

The sessions revealed not only that we are from various strata of society and church but also that we are richly multicultural and multiexperienced. That diversity has united, enriched, and enlivened us. We are connected in many ways to our friends and families, our various communities, and our God. Hilda Barrientos, nurse's aid at St. Luke's Clinic, met physician's assistant Marie de Sales O'Dowd, S.S.N.D., when Hilda was pregnant with triplets. Sister Marie was present during their birth, as well as when Hilda's softball team, *Las Muñecas*, captured the Holy Name girl's league championship. Elva Vazquez's life was broadened and deepened by meeting Father Mark. She not only works in the clinic office but also serves as vice-president of Holy Name Little League. Violeta Olavarria, mother of three and receptionist at St. Luke's, was unable to attend Holy Name School as a little girl because her family couldn't afford the tuition. Today, because of her employment in the clinic, she is able to send her two youngest children to Holy Name School.

The various vocation journeys of the religious in the JUST group demonstrate the incredible variety of experience that ministers in the church today bring to their service of the Kingdom. Those socialized in the pre-Vatican II church and in Irish-, German-, and Czech-Catholic urban communities of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s have been inculturated into new realities on many levels in North Camden—from vibrant, lively liturgical practices to exchanging numerous and heartfelt daily *abrazos* (hugs) with parishioners. Clem Petrik, S.J., the pastor, had been headmaster of Gonzaga High School in Washington, D.C., in the late 1960s, during which time he involved himself in the civil rights movement. Before coming to Holy Name he was in



charge of a Jesuit retreat house in Faulkner, Maryland—an experience that led him to organize Ignatian retreats in North Camden. Sister Dorothy Prettyman, Holy Name's principal, had learned about racism as a young carhop at a restaurant in Delaware, where she was not allowed to serve blacks. The Sisters of St. Joseph's large presence at Holy Name School (four full-time and two part-time workers) bespeaks their order's commitment to the poor and to people of color. Sister Linda Stilling spent seven years as the chaplain to Hispanic patients in Camden's hospitals. Since taking over as director of religious education, she has started a vibrant *Hijas de Maria* group (no men allowed!), overseen the preparation of a hundred first communicants and twenty-five teenage candidates for confirmation, organized the baptismal team program, and coordinated the liturgy committee. Her regular preaching feeds the people of North Camden with the Word of God and is inspired by the countless hours she spends listening to them, both in her regularly flooded office and in their homes. As Sister Linda says, "You spend so much time being with people in their pain that you are able to feel and share their joy." Puerto Rican people in the community often state that Sister Linda is "*más puertorriqueña que americana*"; she herself feels "rooted in two soils." Dave Brooks, S.J., Esq., gave up a life he loved in Washington, D.C., to come and provide legal services to the poor in North Camden. His work on the structural level, organizing a task force that plans with city officials and businesspeople to improve the economic and social infrastructure of North Camden, may ultimately have the most lasting impact of anything the JUST team does here.

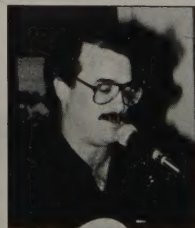
## MODEL FOR MINISTRY

The JUST team is a microcosm of what is happening to the church and ministry in the United States. In previous eras, male priests who were native to the people served had all the power in the parish. Today priestly ministry is done by women and men, old and young, laypeople and religious and clerics. The service of God's Kingdom involves reaching across racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic divides. Bringing the light of Christ to inner-city

America necessitates living in drug-infested communities and finding there not only the relatively small percentage of kids enslaved by the drug trade but also the thousands of young people who avoid it. Edith Velez and Nancy Rupert are two young college students who grew up in Holy Name Parish and found it to be a base from which they could launch into the fulfillment of their dreams. As Nancy's brother Miguel once said to an audience of educators at an Immaculata College conference, "Holy Name used to be a place where I watched black suits going in and out. After Father Jeff came, it became a second home for me and other kids in the neighborhood. Now I know that Holy Name is a place to which I can go in order to get where I want to be." Miguel is a junior at Rutgers-Camden and, after a summer internship at New York University, is becoming an expert in urban housing matters. Holy Name's people and staff have given Miguel and so many others what they need to make it in North Camden, as well as the spirit to stay and try to ameliorate conditions in this little corner of the Kingdom.

## LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

The next ten years will see the Jesuit presence diminish at Holy Name Parish. The groundwork has been laid, and the ministry is no longer dependent on the priests (if it ever was). Deacon Freddy and Carmen Valle oversee everything in the parish, from baptism classes and marriage preparation to Christmas decorating. The JUST team will be peopled as long as God's people are here. Ignatian apostles will be called, will respond, and will serve. The team will continue to ask the questions St. Ignatius poses in the Spiritual Exercises: What have we done for Christ? What are we doing for Christ? What will we do for Christ?



Father Richard G. Malloy, S.J., is a pastoral assistant at Holy Name Church in North Camden, New Jersey, and a doctoral student in cultural anthropology at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.